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Mitchell*

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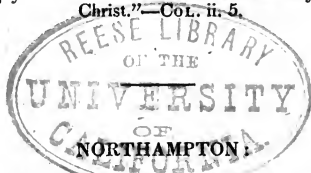
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A
GUIDE
TO THE
PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE
OF THE
CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES
OF
NEW ENGLAND:

WITH A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DENOMINATION.

BY JOHN MITCHELL,
PASTOR OF THE EDWARDS CHURCH, NORTHAMPTON.

“Beholding your Order and the steadfastness of your Faith in
Christ.”—COL. ii. 5.



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PREFACE.

ABOUT three years since, the author published, at New Haven, a volume on the principles and practice of the Congregational Churches ; which was favorably reviewed by a number of our theological quarterlies, and was generally approved of, it is believed, as a correct exhibition of the subject. He has often been desired to have it re-printed, with a more full discussion of some of its topics, and the introduction of others which he had omitted. The present volume is a partial re-print of that ; and might be published as a revised edition. But so thorough has been the revision, and so considerable is the amount of new matter introduced, that it is thought proper to publish it as a new work. A new title has been given it more descriptive of its present design and contents.

It is hoped that this volume may be a useful guide to church members and an acceptable auxiliary to pastors. While it is very desirable

that our churches and congregations should be well informed respecting the principles and usages of their own excellent system, there is not, so far as I know, any treatise written expressly for them, and adapted to popular use,—at least none so full and particular as to render this superfluous. Nor is it possible, perhaps, that their pastors should, amid their many labors, give as much instruction as is desirable on the topics here discussed. Some of these topics are, moreover, of so delicate and personal a nature, that, however important they may be, few pastors will choose to discuss them in their pulpits.

I do not suppose that church order, which is the leading, though not the sole topic of this volume, is the most important thing in religion: but neither is it the least important. It certainly is not *unimportant*. Churches were instituted by Christ for particular purposes; to wit, the edification of the members, and the efficient propagation of religion in the world; and it is obvious that the *manner of their constitution*, that is, their polity, must have much to do with their adaptedness to the ends in view; and of course, that it can never be otherwise

than an important subject to be studied and known.

I cannot but think it has been too much neglected by us. Our fathers sought truth on this subject with the same conscientiousness and care, as they sought the mind of Christ on other subjects. They sought it at the expense of persecution and exile ; and having, with unwearied pains, found it, they rejoiced in it. It was to them "like unto a treasure hid in a field ; the which, when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field." In that age of ecclesiastical confusion, and of turning back towards popery, they professed that "they looked upon the discovery and settlement of the Congregational way, as the boon, the gratuity, the largess of divine bounty, which the Lord graciously bestowed on his people that followed him into the wilderness." But we, their descendants, so far from entering into their studies, are almost content to be ignorant of the very *results* of them, furnished to our hands. Is it not true that not a few of our *ministers* do not inform *themselves* even, much less acquaint their people, thoroughly, with the principles and grounds of our ecclesiastical system ? And does it not hence arise,

that our people are often too little intelligent in this matter properly to discharge the duties which our system requires of them as members ; and too little established in their views to be not soon unsettled and drawn away to churches of a different order, whose polity they find to be more insisted on, and whose claims they are not qualified to canvass ? Ought we not, as a part of our duty to our churches, and especially when large accessions are made to them of the subjects of our revivals, to instruct them, not only in the doctrines and moral duties of their religion, but in the polity also, under which it is their duty and privilege to act ?

Besides the direct practical importance of the subject, it is always desirable that we should be informed respecting it that we may be able properly to appreciate the claims of our own system in comparison with others.

And we shall be excused for believing that it is particularly desirable that the true character of our system should be extensively made known at the present time : when large numbers of emigrants from New England, and their children, have been ejected from another commun-

ion ; and are reproached for their Congregational partialities and habits, as though all the evils in the world had their source in Congregationalism ; and, as the price of peace, must adopt the entire polity of the church which has excinded them, or else be settled on some other plan. For *their* sakes, we could wish that they, with all our emigrants to the great West, would consider well the principles of the churches of their fathers.*

A knowledge of these principles becomes the more important in view of the place which these churches occupy, and doubtless are destined to occupy, in relation to the great cause of Christ on earth. It is not to be supposed, indeed, that the world is to be converted by means of this or any other single denomination of Christians. But if we consider the history of these churches, with their numerous and increasing offspring in the east and in the west—if we consider the

* It is with no unkind feelings, much less with any *party* feelings, that this allusion is made to the Presbyterian church. We love and honor that church. We pray for her prosperity, and for the healing of her dissensions ; and can say, with long cherished affection, Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces.

way in which God has led them from the beginning ; how he planted, and has watered them ;—if we consider their principles and spirit ; their institutions ; their intelligence ; their presses ; their zeal, enlightened, principled, and constant ; and their liberal devotedness to the work of missions and other objects of universal philanthropy ; we cannot but suppose that they are to have a very prominent agency in the renovation of the world. It is therefore important that every member of their communion should be prepared with every sort of instruction and qualification for the fulfillment of so high a destiny.

If this humble volume contribute at all to such a result,—if it cause so much as one church, or member, of so important a communion, to be better informed, or more judicious— if it cast a *little* salt into so great a fountain,— it will not be valueless, nor the labor of it lost.

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PRACTICAL CHURCH MEMBER.

CHAPTER I.

ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES.

If every man should know something of the history of his own religious communion, it is especially desirable that such a history as that of the founders of the Churches of New England should, by every means, be kept alive in the minds of their posterity. The character of our Pilgrim Fathers, the causes and objects of their removal hither, the hardships they suffered—more for the sake of us their children, than for their own,—have a most sacred claim upon our memory. It is a history which every son of New England

should value as his birth-right. "No sober New Englander (says Dr. Dwight) can read the history of his country, without rejoicing that God has caused him to spring from the loins of such ancestors, and given him his birth in a country whose public concerns were entrusted to their management:" and it may be added, that no New Englander who is willingly ignorant of that history is worthy of his origin; or capable of appreciating, or competent to defend, the inestimable inheritance which has descended to him. "I shall count my country lost, (says Cotton Mather) in the loss of the primitive principles, and the primitive practices, upon which it was at first established:" that loss, however, will ensue, and New England will cease to be New England, when her degenerate children, (if that should ever be,) shall be generally ignorant of her history, or cease to revere the memory of her founders.

It is not, however, the design, nor is it within the compass, of this volume, to give such a history. A few things only can be

noticed, as introductory to the matters which are to follow.

The Congregational polity, at least in some of its leading features, began early to be discussed, among the schemes which occupied the Reformers of the sixteenth century ; but did not assume a visible and permanent existence till about 1600. The exiled church at Leyden, under the care of the celebrated Robinson, which afterwards removed to Plymouth, in New England, is regarded as the mother of the Congregational sisterhood, and its pastor, as the founder, or rather *restorer*, of the Congregational plan. We of course believe that this scheme of church order is essentially that of the first christian churches, and that our Savior and the apostles were its authors.

The Leyden church was gathered in England in 1602. Being harrassed by an intolerant establishment, they removed, a few years after, to Holland, and thence, in 1620, to Plymouth ; where the first detach-

ment of them arrived, in a forlorn condition, in the depth of winter. From the distresses of the sea, which had detained them long upon its bosom, they escaped, at length, to encounter the greater distresses of a houseless forest and an inclement season,—distresses, both of sea and land, which only a piety like theirs would have been willing to encounter, and a faith like theirs, been able to sustain.

The settlement at Plymouth was the first of the religious colonies which, within a few years after, during the “Laudian persecution,” peopled the streams and harbors of New England. And this was the beginning of Congregationalism in this country.

Meantime, a branch of the same vine was beginning to take root in England. The first church which was gathered there, after Mr. Robinson’s, was organized, with simple and affecting solemnities, in 1616. Its pastor was a Mr. Jacob, who during a visit to Leyden had embraced Mr. Robinson’s views. In that unpropitious soil it

struggled with even greater difficulties, of another kind, than these encountered which were planted in the wilderness. "It subsisted almost by a miracle for above twenty-four years, shifting from place to place, to avoid the notice of the public," till, the times changing, it openly appeared in a house of worship in 1640.* From these oppressed beginnings, Congregationalism in England has gone on increasing and flourishing, "as a grain of mustard seed," till it now numbers, in that country and in Wales, above two thousand congregations. Of its numbers in Scotland I am not informed; but if the eulogy of the celebrated Chalmers, (a Presbyterian) be just, who says of the Scottish Congregationalists, that they are "the purest body of Christians in the united kingdom," it is to be wished that the number were greater than it is, whatever it may be.

The state of society in the New England settlements, as might be expected from the

* Neal.

causes which originated them, was altogether peculiar. It was entirely and eminently religious. It might be said of every family, that it was a pious family; of every adult individual, that he was strictly moral, if not religious; and of every child, that he was piously educated. They were of the best people of England. For it is the best people,—the most pious and exemplary always, and commonly not the least intelligent and respectable, that persecution banishes from its communion, while it retains the worst. They were the best people of Jerusalem, “who were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen.” They were the best people of France who fled on the revocation of the edict of Nantes. And England had no better people within her bosom than she exiled from it, by the intolerable vexations of her High Commission and other spiritual courts. The immoral and unprincipled—people of lax lives and pliant consciences—are not the people who either disturb the persecutor, or are disturbed by

him. When the Rev. Mr. Cotton, the first minister of Boston, a man of excellent learning and piety, and of much repute in England, as he afterwards was in this country, was informed against in the High Commission, and applied to the earl of Dorset for his interest with the primate, the earl sent him word that, "if he had been guilty of drunkenness, uncleanness, or any such *lesser fault*, he could have got his pardon; but the sin of *puritanism* and *non-conformity* was unpardonable, and therefore he must fly for his safety." It was for "the sin of puritanism and non-conformity," and for no other "fault," that our fathers were forced to leave.

The settlers of New England were all of one persuasion. There was no mixture of emulous and proselyting sects. All the inhabitants of a parish were called by the same bell to the same sanctuary; all loved and respected the same pastor; instructed their children in the same schools, and catechisms; mourned together in the same church-yard: all kept the unity of the

Spirit in the bond of peace ; being called in one hope of their calling ; having one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. If they originally brought any diversity of views with them, their common piety, and common trials, and the earnestness and simplicity of their common search for truth, soon matured them into harmony.

This happy unity prevailed, without any schism among themselves, or appearance of sects, for several generations. Nor was this a drowsy and secure state of things. The presence of God was eminently with them. The first age of New England was one of an almost continuous revival. Preaching was attended with so much power, in some places, " that it was a common inquiry by such members of a family as were detained at home on a Sabbath, whether any had been visibly awakened in the house of God that day." " Few Sabbaths did pass without some evidently converted, and some convincing proof of the power

of God accompanying his word.”* Thus the children of the settlers, as they came forward into life, under the faithful care of their parents, and ministers, were gathered, by the favor of God, into the same communion with themselves. The Spirit of revivals has overshadowed these churches from the beginning.†

* Prince's Christian History.

† There was one considerable period of extensive and alarming declension in the early days of New England. It commenced, visibly, about 1660 or 1670, i. e. with the third generation. The days of trial had by that time passed away, and prosperity, the greatest of all trials to churches, had succeeded.

But even of *this* period, Mather, the historian, says, that “the people of God in this land were not so far gone in degeneracy, but that there were further degress of disorder and corruption to be found in other, yea, in *all* other places where the protestant religion is professed; and the most impartial observers must have acknowledged, that there was proportionably still more of true religion, and a larger number of the strictest saints, in this country, than in any other on the face of the earth.” *Magnal. Book V.* In view of this declension there was a special meeting, or synod, called at Boston, to consider a work of reform: and it is remarkable with what fidelity and minuteness this synod went into an inquiry respecting the prevailing sins,—the result of which they published. A similar reform was engaged in in Connecticut. Many churches set apart seasons for special prayer, faithful inquiry, and solemn renewal of covenant; and “very remarkable was the blessing

The first ministers of New England were episcopally ordained, and had been settled pastors previous to their coming hither. "I have before me, (says Neal,) a list of seventy-seven divines who became pastors of sundry churches and Congregations in New England before 1640, all of whom were in orders in the Church of England." They received their ordination, generally, in the time of the mild arch-bishop Abbot, a man of such piety and temper, that had his predecessor, Bancroft, and his successor, Laud, been men of the like views and spirit, New England had not been settled as it was. They received their education at the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford, and were all of them respectably, and some of them extensively, if not profound-

of God upon the churches which did so." "Many thousands of spectators will testify, that they never saw the special presence of the great God our Savior more notably discovered than in the solemnities of those opportunities."

Though there was no *general* revival during this period, which continued till the great awakening of 1640, there were numerous *local* ones, as for example in Northampton, where there were five such seasons during the ministry of Mr. Shepard.

ly, learned. Their excellence, both as preachers and as men, has been abundantly testified to by men, not only of their own, but of other persuasions. Two persons,* who well knew them, have left the following account of them. "We that saw the persons, who, from four famous colonies assembled in the synod that agreed on our Platform of Church Discipline, cannot forget their excellent character. They were men of great renown in the nation from whence the Laudian persecution exiled them: their learning, their holiness, their gravity, struck all men that knew them with admiration. They were Timothies in their houses, Chrysostoms in their

* Rev. John Higginson, son of the first minister of Salem, and Rev. William Hubbard, minister of Ipswich; both born in England. These venerable men, at an advanced period of their lives, anxious to perpetuate "the old principles of New England," drew up a joint paper, expressly for after generations, which they left behind them, with the following superscription: "*A testimony to the Order of the gospel in the churches of New England: left in the hands of the churches by the two most aged ministers of the gospel yet surviving in the country.*" The former died 1708, aged 93; the latter in 1704, aged 83.

pulpits, Augustines in their disputations. The prayers, the studies, the humble inquiries, with which they sought after the mind of God, were as likely to prosper as any means upon earth. And the *sufferings* wherein they were confessors for the name and the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ, add unto the arguments which would persuade us, that our gracious Lord would reward and honor them, with communicating much of his truth unto them."

There was no one subject which engaged the attention of the founders of New England more than the subject of church polity. Having escaped from the half reformed protestantism of their native land, they were deeply anxious to establish a system here according to the true primitive model.

They were now in circumstances to do so. The reformation in England had stopped short of the reasonable expectations of its most enlightened friends. It was often stationary, often retrograde. It re-

tained, at its best estate, too many of the habiliments, and by far too much of the spirit, of the popish religion which it had professed to supplant. It was retarded by the habits of the people, which had been formed under Catholic influence. It was involved in numberless controversies. It was entangled with interests of State. It was opposed by the claims of arrogant prerogative, and repressed by arbitrary power. Freedom of thought was "an heinous crime," and liberty of conscience, "an iniquity to be punished by the judges." But the New England puritans were now beyond the action of all these adverse influences. They had come out from among them, and were separate; and with an ocean intervening, and a wilderness about them, there was no impediment to their free inquiries.

In these inquiries the Bible was their guide. The Bible alone. They were not ignorant of history, nor slow to avail themselves of any light which fathers, councils, or reformers, might shed upon their minds;

but they regarded the Bible alone as authoritative. If alone *authoritative*, it must be *sufficient* alone ; and the man of God, possessing the Bible, is, in respect to all that is essential to faith or practice, *perfect, thoroughly furnished* unto all good works. So the Puritans believed and acted. They built their system upon the Bible, and thought the foundation broad enough. They needed no traditions, or inventions of men, or reasons of State, to make it broader. Deeply feeling their responsibility to the God of the Bible, to that law and testimony they constantly referred their own and other men's opinions. "The supreme judge, (say they, in their Platform) by which all controversies in religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be *no other*, but the Holy Scripture delivered by the Spirit ; into which Scripture so delivered, our faith is finally resolved." What a world of confusion

and darkness would have been prevented, had all men been as simple in their appeal to the Scriptures as were the Puritans of New England !

Besides their numerous tracts and volumes on the subject of church order, it was abundantly discussed in sermons, and in other forms. The results of these discussions were embodied, generally, in the Cambridge Platform, which was considered and agreed to by a Synod convened at that place, in 1648, and recommended to the acceptance of the churches. This Synod was composed of ministers from all the colonies ; the invitation being general, and the interest a common and important one. They also adopted a confession of faith, namely, the Westminster ; which had then lately been set forth. For this the Savoy Confession was afterwards substituted.

Having finished their work, in which they had proceeded with great harmony, " they did, with an extraordinary elevation of soul and voice, then sing together the

song of Moses and the Lamb, in the fifteenth chapter of Revelation:" and thus the session was closed.

From that time onward, the Cambridge Platform, (till it was superseded in Connecticut, in 1708, by the Saybrook Platform) was the general directory of the Churches. It did not originate, or essentially modify their practice, but rather recognized and digested the principles upon which they were already established. It is an instrument the wisdom of which will be more seen, the more it is studied, and compared with the Scriptures.

The Saybrook Platform is based upon the same general views as the Cambridge; differing from it only, or chiefly, in the further provision it makes in respect to councils, and associations of ministers.

Such, briefly, is the rise and early history of the New England Churches. Of other institutions which have had their origin and growth with these churches, I can take no notice.

It is the habit of infidels and vain persons, of Catholics, and, I am sorry to add, of some others, from whom better things might be hoped, to disparage the memory of the Pilgrims,—with what motives, it need not be mentioned. But the attempt is vain. Their works speak for them. Their schools, their colleges, their laws and governments,—to say nothing of their churches,—institutions which all men admire, liberties which all men are breathing after, a state of society which, for its intelligence and morals, has no parallel in any country,—these are their memorials. When our praise of the Pilgrims, or, rather, when our gratitude to God on their behalf, surpasses the benefits received through them; when it rises higher, or spreads farther, than the healthful influences which they originated, then shall our gratitude be abated, and our praise restrained.

As it regards the Congregational communion at the present day, its members still cherish, in a good degree, the princi-

ples and habits of their fathers. They are still the enlightened friends of liberty and religion; the efficient patrons of education; the advocates, even to a proverb among the licentious, of law, and order, and virtuous morals. If in some degree they have declined from the strictness of former times, it may yet be said that they are among the *most* strict of the existing denominations. If, as a body, they keep the Sabbath with less exactness than the fathers did, (a fact to be deplored) it may still be asked, what body of Christian professors respect it *more* than they do, or have shown themselves more solicitous to protect it from profanation? If less severe, or strenuous, in their opposition to vice, which of the sister denominations is before them in every work of reform; or against which has the enmity of the profligate been more manifested on this account?

I hope we may never be backward to confess our sins, and to lament our degeneracy. But whatever our sin, or degeneracy, may be, may it never be that of aban-

doning the principles and habits of our fathers !

We revere the memory of the pilgrims. We revere their principles. We cherish their institutions. We cannot but love the churches of their planting ; not merely, or blindly, because of their origin with them, but because of their scriptural simplicity and tried excellence. We hold fast that which is good. We contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, identical, as we believe, with the faith of these churches ; and for its precious fruits, as developed in their influence.

We cannot look at the results of the Congregational system, ecclesiastical and doctrinal, as we behold them in New England, and elsewhere, without feeling that for us to abandon it, would make us culpable as freemen and philanthropists, as well as degenerate as sons and Christians. If it was an enlightened piety in the fathers which devised the system, must it not be either ignorance or degeneracy in the sons,

that discards it? And though we can appreciate and acknowledge whatever is excellent in other communions, yet, after more than two centuries experience of the fruits of this, unaided as it was, and for a long time unmolested, by other systems, and operating alone in forming the character of New England; we may, without bigotry we trust, say to such as would proselyte us, or our children, to other modes, brought in to rival or supplant the Congregational, Show us *better fruits*, before we forsake the tree which produces these.*

And we cannot help demanding, if this

* "Let it be recollected, that for nearly a hundred years after the settlement of New England, there were very few of any denomination in the land besides Congregationalists. In 1700, there were in all the New England states then settled, 900 Episcopalians, [equal to one moderate congregation] of whom 185 were communicants. There were no Methodists; and with the exception of Rhode Island, very few Baptists. Not a single church of this denomination existed in Connecticut, and but two or three in Massachusetts. There were at the same time one hundred and twenty Congregational churches, besides thirty churches composed of Indians. It is plain then that New England is, what it is, chiefly from the influence of the Congregationalists, and of Congregational principles." *Hawes's Tribute*.

land were now a wilderness, as it was, and the foundations of our welfare were now about to be laid, who were the men, or what the principles, which were better fitted for the work than those we are considering? And if these principles are any less valuable now than they once were, if they are less scriptural, or less efficacious, let the system be brought forward, of all the existing systems of faith and order, which is *more* scriptural, and endued with *greater efficacy* to make men virtuous and happy. "Where is truth, where is piety, where is hope and salvation to be found, if not in these Christian societies, which, for two hundred years, have shared so signally in the protection and care of Almighty God, and which, for the same period, have exerted so happy an influence on all the dearest interests and hopes of this favored community?"* Or if these principles do not now reside in the Congregational communion, if the gold has be-

* Hawes.

come utterly dim, and the most fine gold changed, let it be shown in what communion they do reside—and we will be converts to that communion. But if no such church or system can be named, then let the Congregational descendants of the Pilgrims sustain, under God, to the latest times, the faith, and the order, of their Congregational progenitors.

Meantime, we repeat the testimony of the venerable men before quoted,* and hand it down to our children. “We do therefore earnestly testify, (say they) that if any who are given to change, do rise up to unhinge the well established churches in this land, it will be the duty and interest of the churches to examine whether the men of this trespass are more prayerful, more watchful, more zealous, more patient, more heavenly, more universally conscientious, and harder students, and better scholars, and more willing to be informed and advised, than those great and good

* Messrs. Higginson and Hubbard.

men who left unto the churches what they now enjoy. If they be not so, it will be wisdom for the children to forbear pulling down with their own hands the houses of God which were built by their wiser fathers, until they have better satisfaction." And they conclude with their "prayers unto the Lord for these holy churches, [in which, who will not unite?] that he would surely visit them, and grant much of his gracious presence and Spirit in the midst of them; and raise up, from time to time, those who may be happy instruments of bringing down the hearts of the parents into the children. The Lord bless these His churches, and keep them *steadfast*, both in the *faith*, and in the *order* of the gospel, and be with them, as he was with their fathers, and never leave them nor forsake them!"

CHAPTER II.

PRINCIPLES OF THE CONGREGATIONAL SYSTEM.

As the rights and duties of the church-member are essentially modified by the polity of the church to which he belongs, it is important to him, and also to the church, that he should understand the principles of that polity. The government of a church, like any other government, is a practical thing: it defines relations, distributes powers, prescribes duties. And these vary with the character of the system. It is therefore obvious, that though all believers, considered simply as disciples of Christ, have the same duties to discharge, yet considered as subject to this or that particular ecclesiastical organization, their duties, as well as their privileges, may be quite diverse. As the active duties of the citizen of a republic are not the

same as those of the passive subject of an oligarchy ; being more numerous, more responsible, more noble : so, under the various schemes of church order, there is more or less for the laity to do, or to submit to, in the management of affairs, as the schemes have more or less of the character of free institutions.

The following are the essential features of the Congregational system. They relate to the constitution of churches, their members, powers, officers, and relations.

A church is a society of believers united together, by their own consent, or covenant, in obedience to the will of Christ, for the observance of ordinances, their own edification, and the propagation of the faith. Each society, thus formed, with its proper officers, is to all intents a church.

No persons are to be received as members but such as are hopefully renewed by the Spirit of God, giving credible evidence of the same.

Church power, as it is called, that is, the

power to receive, and discipline members, to elect officers, and to do such other acts as concern the body, in matters of practice, is vested in the church itself, and not in its officers. The latter have their proper authority and influence, (as will be noticed elsewhere,) but have not power to rule the church, except by consent of the brotherhood.

The officers of the church are of two orders, namely, presbyters (or ministers) and deacons. They are elected by the brethren, and ordained by presbyters.

The churches are, in a qualified sense, independent. No church admits the right of any other church, or number of churches, or church officers, to interfere *authoritatively* with its faith or discipline. They maintain, however, an endeared and extended communion and co-operation with one another; and are so far mutually subject to discipline, that an erring church is open to the reproofs of others, and, if the case require, may be disowned from the general communion.

They do not allow the imposition of human creeds, or standards, as tests of orthodoxy, or terms of communion.

The relations of Church and Society, as they have been established by New England Congregationalists, recognizing both their distinct and their united existence and capacities, are, it is believed, peculiar, and eminently happy.

I have merely *stated* these items, without the *grounds* or *proofs* of them. For the elucidation of some of them, I subjoin the following remarks.

1. Churches are, in a limited sense, *voluntary associations*; being formed by the free consent of the members. They can be properly formed in no other way. Men are not *born* into the church, but into the *world*: though volumes have been written to the contrary. Nor can any act of power, ecclesiastical, or civil; or any parish, or diocesan, or other geographical lines, make them members. It must be by their own intelligent act.

It is only in this restricted sense, however, that they are of the nature of voluntary associations ; being in all other important respects dependent, not upon the will of the members, but upon the will of Christ.*

2. Though we have no *public* Articles of Religion, to which, as a denomination, we require subscription, each church has its own Confession of Faith and Covenant.

These Confessions are usually brief and comprehensive, comprising only those articles of the Christian system, which are regarded as fundamental. Their uses are these. They are *declarative* of the faith of the church ; showing in what sense it understands the Scriptures, and what scheme of doctrine it embraces, in distinction from other schemes. They also show the *har-*

* A proper voluntary association is one whose existence and whole economy are a conventional thing. It is self-constituted, prescribes its own laws, admits to membership whom it will, is without responsibility, and may change and modify its form and policy, or cease to be, according to its own pleasure. The churches of Christ ought not in any manner to be confounded with these ; as perhaps they have sometimes been, by those who are fond of calling them "voluntary associations."

mony of the members in respect to faith. The ends for which the members are associated require that they should be substantially agreed in their views; and this agreement is signified by their assent to a common confession.

The Covenant is a solemn recognition of the *practical duties* of the Christian profession. It is an engagement on the part of the members, personally entered into as it respects God, and mutually as it respects themselves, to walk agreeably to the laws of Christ's house.

Regarded as *forms*, also, the Confession and Covenant are important, as giving distinctness and solemnity to the *act* of a christian profession.

The practice of religious covenanting is very ancient. For covenanting with God, see Gen. 17. Deut. xxix. 10—13. Exod. xix. 8. Neh. ix. 38, (in which instance the covenant was *written* and *sealed*,) and other passages. For covenanting with one another, see Neh. x. 28—31. 2 Cor. viii. 5.*

* See Upham's Rat. Dis. §§29—31.

3. Congregationalists hold to the *local* and separate being of churches, as composed of single societies of believers, in opposition to the idea of an *extended* church, composed of many societies; as a catholic, a national, or a diocesan church. The New Testament never uses the word *church* in this extended sense, (except as it speaks of the whole family of the redeemed,) but applies it only to local assemblies; as the church of Ephesus, the church in Smyrna, at Corinth, &c. When it speaks of provinces, or countries, it uses the plural, *churches*; as the churches of Galatia, of Macedonia, the seven churches which are in Asia, &c.

And this is the Congregational idea. Each society is a church, a whole church, and not a fraction, or constituent part of a church. It is complete in itself, and competent to all the acts which it is proper for a church to do. Hence, while we hear of The Church of England, The Presbyterian Church, The Methodist Episcopal Church, meaning extended bodies, having common

and imperative articles of subscription, and amenable to some central or common power, we never hear of *The Congregational Church*, but they are spoken of as *churches*. Nor do we commonly hear from intelligent Congregationalists such phrases as *our Church*, *our Zion*; or such personifications as *her communion*, *her pale*, and the like. Such imposing phrases and ideas, though there may be no great harm in them, perhaps, are as uncongregational as they seem to us unscriptural. In the mouths of some they are unamiably sectarian.

The Congregational communion is not one great, imposing, *consolidated church*; but a band of related *Christian families*; bound together by oneness of faith, affection, and aim; having the Bible for their common directory, and Christ for their common head. Such were the New Testament churches.

4. That churches should be composed of true believers, and of such only, is es-

sential, not only to the purity of churches, but to every object for which they exist. Supposing them to be made up indifferently of believers and unbelievers, the children of God and the children of the world, there could be neither fellowship, discipline, co-operation, nor visible separateness from the world. What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, or what communion hath light with darkness? This is clear enough in scripture, and in reason; but not every church has acted upon it.

If churches are to be formed carefully and strictly upon this principle, we may see how wrong it is to *invite* the entrance of the unconverted, either by urgency, or by too easy admission. How often have churches sought to enlarge themselves by lowering the terms of admission; by too large or lax a charity, in respect to evidence of grace; by extolling the saving efficacy of *their* sacraments, and “valid ordinances;” or by the too ready embrace of a merely sectarian and proselyting zeal?

How often is "the temple of God" sinned against, in these and similar ways! "But let every man take heed how he buildeth." The apostolic churches were composed of none but those who were hopefully renewed, according to the best evidence that could be had of them. They were all addressed as "saints," "saints in Christ," "saints and faithful." Our Savior himself offered no facilities for the admission of the impenitent, but discouraged them; as the Bible everywhere does. Ps. l. 16. Matt. viii. 19, 20. Luke xiv. 26—33. Eccles. v. 5. 1 Cor. iii. 10, 12, 13.

5. As the members are required to have fellowship one with another, and as there can be no fellowship with those who are brought together without consent, or likeness of character, (for how can two walk together except they be agreed?) it is manifestly fit and reasonable that new members should come in by consent of the brotherhood.

Again, as the brethren *admit* members,

so it is for them to *expel* members, when their conduct requires it. In other words, as it was with them to say whether a person was worthy of their fellowship at the first ; it is with them to say whether he *continues* worthy, or has forfeited their confidence. That is ; the power of admission, and of discipline, is properly in the brotherhood. Suppose it to be elsewhere, and to be exercised independently of them : it may force an unworthy and unwelcome member upon them, but it cannot force their confidence and love. He may be *among* them, but he is not *of* them.

6. If the right of admitting and excluding *members* be important to the brotherhood, much more is the right of choosing their own *ministers*. My edification, as dependent on my minister ; the love and respect I am required to bear towards him ; my concern for my children and friends, and for all who are to share with me in the influence of his ministrations ; and many other things, make it exceedingly desira-

ble to me, that I should have a voice in his election.

Nor let it be said that the brethren are not *qualified* for such a trust. Our Savior virtually judges otherwise, where he says, the sheep know the shepherd's voice, and a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers. True Christians soon discern the spirit of their ministers; and are made to feel what occasion they have in them either to rejoice, or to mourn. Blind guides may satisfy the blind, but not the "children of the day."

"Of such moment is the preservation of this power, [of choosing their officers] that the churches exercised it in the presence of the apostles."* Acts xiv. 23,† and vi. 3—5.

7. Of church officers we have but two kinds, ministers and deacons, because but

* Camb. Plat.

† This passage reads in our translation, "they *ordained*," &c. but the word in the original, means to *elect by lifting up the hand*.

two are recognized in the New Testament. I speak of *permanent* officers. The *apostolic* office was not a permanent one, but expired with the twelve.

The words *bishop*, *elder*, *pastor*, and *minister*, are used in the New Testament to signify the same office, being applied to the same person. Hence the *equality* of ministers. It was not intended that some should be set up as overseers and lords over the others. "Be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren." "Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so it shall not be among you."

The three grades of bishops, priests, and deacons, are not to be found in the New Testament. The chapter and verse cannot be named. Of course, as they are not in the Bible, they are not of *divine right*, whatever may be said of them from history or expediency.

Lay-presbyters, or ruling elders, are

supposed, by Presbyterians, to be authorized by 1 Tim. v. 17. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in word and doctrine." But it is thought by very judicious critics that they have misapprehended the meaning of the passage. Let the elders (ministers) who rule well, especially those who are laborious in preaching, be counted worthy of double honor. Compare with 1 Thess. v. 12, 13, and Heb. xiii. 17. Reference is also made, in support of the office, to Rom. xii. 7, 8, and 1 Cor. xii. 28. These passages speak of *ruling*, and of *helps* and *governments*, but specify nothing as to a government by ruling elders.* The *expediency*, or lawfulness, of this method of government, is a separate question, which every one will settle for himself.

* "This distinction between *teaching* and *ruling* elders, if it ever existed, (which I will neither affirm nor deny,) was certainly not of long continuance; for St. Paul makes it a qualification requisite in *all* presbyters, or bishops, that they be able to teach and instruct others. 1 Tim. iii. 2, &c.—Mosheim, Bk. I.

8. From our having no public Confession of Faith, or general Directory for the worship and discipline of our churches, it is often imagined, and ignorantly alledged against us, by those who think such things essential, that we must necessarily be chargeable with looseness and uncertainty.

But our practice in this respect is that of the primitive churches. *They* had no such Confessions and Directories. We find no instance of our Savior, or the apostles, or prophets, referring to any confession, symbol, directory, rubric, or formula whatever, except the Sacred Oracles. Our Confession and Directory are the same. Though each of our churches has its particular Confession, and, commonly, a few simple articles of practice, drawn up for the sake of convenience, they are never appealed to as "standards," or matters of authority. Our standard is the Bible. We think we need no other. We think that the Bible contains, in the form of express statute or recorded practice, not only all that is essential to the faith of churches,

but all that is requisite to order and discipline; and that its instructions are sufficiently ascertainable without the medium of a human compend. The Bible declares its own authority and sufficiency, and requires a direct reference to itself on all questions of a religious or moral nature. 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. John v. 39. Matt. xxii. 29. Ps. cxix. 105. Prov. vi. 23. Is. viii. 20.

If it be supposed, from our having no standards, that we have therefore no distinctness or harmony of belief, or practice; or that our sentiments are uncertain, and not to be known; the supposition is a very mistaken one. The sentiments of no denomination are more widely or distinctly known,—gathered, it is true, not from Articles, numbered and stereotyped; but from the living pulpit, from lucid and laborious authors, and from thousands of tracts and periodicals. And the *harmony* of our churches has been proverbial. Notwithstanding their perfect and universal freedom, as to what they shall believe or prac-

tice, there has been a remarkable agreement both of faith and practice among them, and a prevailing likeness of character, throughout New England ; and for above two centuries. What churches have dwelt together in greater affection and unity ? In what body of Christians have there been fewer defections from the faith ? And not only here, but wherever the denomination is known. The following testimony of the Congregational Union of England and Wales respecting the denomination in that country, may stand for all. “ They wish it to be observed, (they say,) that notwithstanding their jealousy of subscription to Creeds and Articles, and their general disapproval of the imposition of any human standard, they are far more agreed in their doctrines and practices than any church which enjoins subscription and enforces a human standard of orthodoxy.”

Whatever may be said of the utility of creeds, we have, in the history of these churches, a practical demonstration that

they are at least not *indispensable*, either to the being or well-being of churches.

There can be no objection to creeds, that is, to compends of doctrine, for certain purposes. They have their uses, and perhaps important uses. But Congregationalists object to their being imposed as *tests*, or set up as standards, to enforce uniformity. We deprecate the *authority* they are apt to grow to, to the prejudice of the rights of conscience, and the word of God. As fences against heresy, experience does not prove them to be very effectual. As articles of peace, and bonds of union, we fear they *create* divisions as often as they prevent them. How large a proportion of the internal troubles of churches which use them,—their “Acts and Testimonies,” their protests and counter-protests, their hot contentions, and, in many cases, their violent disruptions, arise from nothing else than zeal for standards? There are some who think that heaven and earth should pass sooner than one jot or tittle of the exact wording of the prescribed creed and order

of their church be not fulfilled; and any brother that offends in one point, they hold to be guilty of all, and obnoxious to ecclesiastical censure. They put their strait-jacket upon the limbs of Charity, who loves freedom as she loves truth, and make their narrow views the jail-limits within which she walks afflicted and confined.

To those who have looked at history, or at human nature, the conviction is hardly avoidable, that the tendency of creeds, especially when enforced to the letter, is just the other way from that which is claimed for them. As to the entire uniformity which is aimed at by means of them, this is not attainable, as all experience shows. And if the end itself be not attainable, still less is it attainable by the *means* relied on. The attempt to *force* an agreement is likely to result in the opposite. Agreement, so far as it is attainable, must be voluntary and unconstrained. The human conscience, made free by its Creator, revolts at the idea of bondage to any human authority. And this reluctance is in none stronger

than in the truest sons of the gospel ; who have an injunction from their Lord, to call no man their father upon earth ; for one is their Father, which is in heaven, and one is their Master, even Christ ; and an apostolic exhortation to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made them free,—having reference to this very subject, the imposition of a creed ; namely, that of the Jews, upon the Galatian converts. The tendency of religion itself is, to liberate the conscience from mere human authority, (viewed *as such*,) and to subject it to God alone.

With regard to the Westminster and Savoy Confessions, which were formally adopted by the early New England churches, and are still esteemed by us, as systems of truth, they have never had the authority of *standards* with us, as some have supposed. They originated in England. They were consented to, “for substance of doctrine,” by the New England churches, instead of drawing up a confession for themselves, (which they have never done,)

for the sake of declaring their doctrinal agreement with Christians on the other side of the water ; from which some had accused them of departing.

They were never, to my knowledge, set up as standards, and made of the like authority with us, as confessions are with other communions. No candidate for the ministry is required to subscribe them, *ex animo*, or otherwise ; no church adopts them for its private use ; nor is reference ever made to them, so far as I know, in cases of discipline for heresy. They have the authority of *truth*, with us, so far as they agree with the Bible ;—and it is believed, that, regarded as *systems*, whatever exceptions may be made to some of their particular statements, they are far nearer to “ the faithful word,” than the loose Arminian systems which stand opposed to them. They have no other authority than this. And the same may be said of our *Platforms*. They are lights which all are free to use, or not, as they please.]

9. The things which most distinguish the Congregational plan from others, are these two: the importance it gives to the suffrages of the brotherhood, in matters of discipline and government; and the independence of the churches of foreign control, or supervision: which two things may be stated in one, namely, the *self-government* of the churches. In other systems the powers of government are vested in the officers, chiefly in the clergy, exclusive of the brotherhood. In the Congregational, they are vested in the church as a body, including its officers; the latter acting, in their official capacity, as the guides and executives of the church.

These powers are vested thus in the church,

(1.) Because it was so done in the New Testament Churches, as our references to the Scriptures show. Our Savior himself gives such power to the churches. Matt. xviii. 17, 18.*

* To the independence and self-government of the primitive

(2.) It would seem to be the *natural right* of the churches to govern themselves,—un-

churches, we have the testimony of Mosheim. "In those primitive times, (says that respected historian,) each Christian church was composed of the people, the presiding officers, and the assistants, or deacons.—The highest authority was in the people, or the whole body of Christians; for even the apostles themselves inculcated by their example, that nothing of any moment was to be done or determined on, but with the knowledge and consent of the brotherhood. Acts i. 15: vi. 3: xv. 4: xxi. 22."—"The assembled people, therefore, elected their own rulers and teachers, or by their authoritative consent received them, when nominated to them. They also by their suffrages rejected or confirmed the laws, that were proposed by their rulers, in their assemblies; they excluded profligate and lapsed brethren, and restored them; they decided the controversies and disputes that arose, &c." And this order of things the same historian finds to have continued for near two centuries. "During a great part of this [the second] century all the churches continued to be, as at first, *independent* of each other, or were connected by no consociations or confederations. Each church was a kind of little independent republic, governed by its own laws, which were enacted, or at least sanctioned, by the people."—Dr. Murdock's Edition, 1832, Vol. I. pp. 81, 82, 86.

Mosheim has, of course, no reference in these passages to modern Congregationalism, but has his eye simply upon the primitive churches, and the matters of fact concerning them. There can be no doubt that he has exhibited them as they were, the same being evident from the New Testament itself; and the description exactly answers to our Congregational system.

less this right is denied them in the New Testament ; which is not done, but on the contrary, the right is there confirmed to them. The exercise of this right is also *necessary* to the due performance of duties which are enjoined upon the body, those namely, of watchfulness and discipline ; which cannot be performed, and, in point of fact, *are not* performed, at least according to the intent and letter of them, in churches whose government is aristocratic, as may be noticed hereafter.

(3.) The powers in question are no less *safely*, than they are scripturally, confided to the brotherhood. It is believed, that the churches, with their pastors, are competent to the maintenance of their own purity, peace, and order, according to the laws of Christ ; and that the powers requisite to this are likely to be used as conscientiously and judiciously, and are as little liable to abuse or neglect, in their hands, as in the hands of church officers alone. Power in the hands of a few, in a hierarchy particularly, (such is the nature of

man) is prone to be consequential and dictatorial. It delights in the show and exercise of authority, and in the submissive reverence of its subjects ; and too often has its own importance and preservation in view, not less than the interests for which it professes to legislate. I do not aver, that it always assumes this bearing, actually, but such is its *tendency*, as there is too much melancholy history to show. How many have been the abuses of these forms of government ! How many their neglects ! How often have high church prerogatives and powers—lordly in nature, name, and exercise ; and aspired to by improper men, if they have not spoiled the simplicity of good men—been exerted in ways immensely injurious to religion,—immensely foreign to its nature and interests as a spiritual thing, and oppressive and distressing to the most conscientious of its subjects ; and how often, also, have they been negligent and indifferent where corruption and disorders, doctrinal and moral, have demanded their exercise !

The government of the churches vested in themselves, is a very different thing from a government solely by officers. From its nature here, it is incapable of ostentation or aggrandizement, or of far-reaching abuses. Its exercise, in the hands of the brotherhood, is the humble discharge of duties where all are alike responsible and alike concerned in the consequences ; where the power of each, if any be disposed to use it improperly, is balanced by the equal voice and vote of the others ; and where, in cases of censure, particularly, each is reminded to do what he does, "in the spirit of meekness ; considering himself, lest he also be tempted." There may be in a reverend assembly of divines, or house of bishops, or other formal legislative or judicial body, more learning and gravity, but there is not always more simplicity and prayerfulness, than in the humble *church meeting* ; whose very want of the consequence which learning and office give, makes them the more self-distrustful and circumspect, in what they

do, and the more disposed, in their lack of wisdom, to ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.

(4.) The *discipline* of the church is a different thing in the hands of the church, from what it is in merely official hands. It is another and a *better* thing.

In the first place, we want the *aid* of the brotherhood in our endeavors to *reclaim* offenders. A member will often deal with a fellow member,—a plain man with a plain man—more hopefully than a bishop, or any other church officer can. They are better acquainted, and understand each other better; and have more that is common between them, of language and sympathy. This is precisely the means which Christ has appointed in his rule, in the xviiith of Matthew. He does not direct the pastor, rector, or session, to take the offender in hand, immediately; but a *brother* is to deal with him, in the first instance alone; then with one or two others; and then the church as a body. At the same time, the pastor may use his influence in

addition to theirs. The benefit of this method is such, and so obvious, that I think that those who know what it is by *experience* will not willingly exchange it for others.

Again, the *censures* of the church are more effectual, proceeding from the brotherhood. They are another thing in their *nature*, and another thing in their *efficacy*. A censure proceeding from the *authority* of a church officer, or church judicatory, is an *official act*, and is felt to be no more than this by the subject of it : but proceeding from the brotherhood, the equals and associates of the offender, it has the nature of *public opinion*, and falls, as such, with peculiar force upon his spirit. It is so felt by him, and by the church ; it is so regarded by “them that are without ;” and I doubt not, that such it was intended to be, by him who instituted the discipline. ‘But ye brethren, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be *ashamed*.’ The shame arises from his having forfeited the Christian esteem, and conse-

quently the fellowship, of the society which had received him. He is disowned—stricken from their list. It is evidently the design of our Savior, in the result to which he brings us, in his rule, and of much else that is said on discipline, in the New Testament, to place the offender, not under the simple ban of official *authority*, but,—which is much more painful and subduing,—in the strong light of an unfavorable *opinion*, expressed by the voice of the society towards him, “as an heathen man and a publican,” and one not to be companied with as a Christian. And so, on the other hand, if the delinquent be *restored*, it is the same popular voice, or opinion, that restores him. It is that which alone *can* restore him, in reality ; for the good opinion of the society is that to which he is *to be* restored, and not merely to a “*name* to live.” An act of power may restore him to his place in *form* merely, but cannot restore him to confidence and esteem: without which his restoration is a nullity.

This, then, is the peculiar efficacy of the Congregational method of discipline. It lies in the expressed opinion of the brotherhood. It lies there, I mean, so far as its efficacy is derived at all *from men*. Of course the offender is to be sensible that he has broken the laws of Christ, and done dishonor to religion; and from that source chiefly his compunctions should arise.

And how much is discipline worth where such is *not* its efficacy? How much is it ever worth, as to its moral effect, if it do not come to this,—if it be not sustained by the voice of the church as a body? How much effect will the bare decision of a judge, or a bench of judges, have upon the mind of a citizen, so long as he is sustained under it by the popular voice and sympathy? And how much salutary moral effect did all the pompous solemnities, mulcts, imprisonments, penances, or anathemas, ever have, that have proceeded merely from mitred *authority*, and commissioned *power*,—independently of the voice of the people?

If the efficacy of discipline, must, after all, then, depend on the opinion of the brotherhood, why not come to that *directly*, and *surely*, as we do in our Congregational way? The Congregational system “arrives by a direct road, at the point which other modes, [if they reach it at all,] reach circuitously, and by implication. It speaks the voice of the church, and always speaks as the church thinks. It is an expression of the sentiments and convictions of the whole body. As such, it has a force in honoring Christ’s laws, and in rousing the conscience of an offender, which other modes have vainly essayed to obtain by imposing forms, solemn warnings, and dreadful denunciations.”*

The *independence* of the churches is a necessary part of their self-government. Their powers become a nullity if they resign themselves to a superior jurisdiction. If they are not competent to determine ul-

* Ch. Spect. 1831.

timately for themselves, if their doings either want confirming, or are liable to reversal, by a higher power, they are virtually void.

Our Savior himself gives this ultimate power to the church, Matt. xviii. 17, 18. He does not say, If the offending member neglect to hear the church, let the case be carried up to some higher tribunal; but the case is to be terminated there.

And while this ultimate power of deciding, in cases of discipline particularly, is important to the fellowship of the members, (for how can they have fellowship with a member whom they are forced to retain against their consent?) we are persuaded that cases generally can be determined better by the church, than by any other tribunal. The church where the case arises is best acquainted with the facts and parties; and it is not difficult to conceive, that acting under a solemn sense of their responsibility as the ultimate judges, they will act more cautiously and judiciously, than if acting under the im-

pression, that if they commit an error, there is another tribunal to revise and correct their doings. And in addition to this, there is an advantage in the comparative *privacy* and *dispatch* which are secured by this method. A matter is settled sooner, and with less publicity, when it is settled within the church, than when it is carried abroad, by one remove and another. It cannot be carried abroad thus, without extending, more or less, its agitating effects, and its unpleasant notoriety. Settled at *home*, it is comparatively hidden and confined. Settled in a public judicatory, it is heard in its discussions, and reported on its journals; so that that which was done in a corner is proclaimed upon the house-tops. Why not apply our Savior's rule to churches, as well as to members, and let their private difficulties be settled in private, as far as they may?

I do not mean that cases should never be carried beyond the church in which they originate: but it should be done for advice, rather than adjudication; and the

more seldom it is done the better. It may look well in theory to provide for a succession of appeals,—it may look like a scrupulous regard to justice,—but I cannot help thinking it an evil in fact. We know how it is in civil litigation. The parties, because they may, are disposed to carry their causes from one bench up to another, till they come to the last ; and will never be satisfied that justice is done them, so long as there is a higher court to review the decisions of the lower ; nor are satisfied then, any better than at the first, if they are satisfied as well ; while the community at large, from seeing the case so long and successively debated, are not unlikely to be impressed with a belief that the case is complicated, and justice doubtful.

The early Congregationalists of New England were very tenacious of the self-government of the churches ; as their descendants, generally, and those of England, are now. I will not enlarge on the subject farther than to observe, that the wisdom of our fathers in this particular, as in

many others, receives increasing confirmation from year to year. It is more and more a matter of experience, that church difficulties are soonest and most satisfactorily healed by the churches themselves; and that when it is necessary to go to a council, *persuasion* is better than *authority*: that is, an advisory council, which is the Congregational mode, is better than an ecclesiastical judicatory, or other law-dispensing power.*

Finally; It is no small argument in favor of this whole system of polity, that it is eminently adapted to make *practical* men. Though the position be admitted, which

* If this be so, the question naturally arises, Have the sons of New England been doing well, in neglecting, as they have, the approved wisdom of their fathers, in rearing up so many churches, in new settlements, on another plan than theirs? If *they* deemed the Congregational plan worth all that it cost them, is it not worth preserving and extending by us, among their emigrant descendants in the West and South? Its fruits *here* are confessed to be excellent: is it not worth as much there as here? Would not its fruits be as valuable upon the lakes and streams of the West, as they are upon the shores and rivers of the East? Will not the vine bear transplanting

has been so commonly admitted in ecclesiastical controversies, that there is no prescribed form of church, order in the New Testament, still there is a principle which, plainly, ought to guide us in the framing of our systems; which is this. *The ends of church order must be the same as the ends of truth itself.* It must have been the divine intention that they should conspire together to one result; the latter as ancillary to the former. Whatever the system be, therefore, which we adopt, it should be such as to concur with and promote those ends of truth; and that is the best system which does this most effectually: so that

from the comparatively barren soil of New England, to the rich bottoms of the great Valley?

It is computed that 400 churches, or more, have been gathered in the west for the *Presbyterian* church by the benevolence of Connecticut alone. The men and means were furnished here, and sent out chiefly by the Connecticut Missionary Society. And I have seen it stated, by high Presbyterian authority, that not less than *fifteen hundred* of their churches are essentially Congregational in their origin and habits. A high compliment both to the zeal and liberality of New England men. Add these 1500 churches which are Congregational in spirit to those which are such in form, and there is not in the world a more intelligent, efficient, and pious body of Christians.

admitting that the New Testament does prescribe no order, it does not follow from this, that it is a matter of indifference what our order is, and that we have unqualified liberty to devise what system we will.*

What then are the ends of religious truth? They are, first, to make men pious; secondly, to make them useful. First, piety, then activity, (or zeal,) directed by knowledge, in the cause of Christ. That is, the ends of truth are, in a word, to make practical Christians.

And this the Congregational system eminently does. While other systems exclude the laity from ecclesiastical affairs, altogether, or in a great degree, regarding them only as worshippers and tax-payers, the Congregational churches devolve upon their members the responsible duties of discipline and government. They are

* Without either disputing or admitting this position, I cannot help observing that the New Testament does at least give us precedents. The New Testament churches certainly had some order; and what that order was, it is not difficult to see. Whether the form assumed by them was designed to be always obligatory or not, we leave every one to determine for himself.

thus called habitually to act together. Their wisdom and piety are habitually put in exercise; and by this means are necessarily increased. Each church is a school of mutual instruction in the great principles and precepts of the gospel; where the younger are benefitted by the experience of the older, and all by the collected wisdom of the body, and by that of the pastor, their common guide. And the result is strikingly obvious, in the known practical character of this body of Christians. Look at their movements in all the practical concerns of religious and social life. Look at their colleges, and schools, and other institutions, designed and sustained by them, for the good of the world. Look at their efficiency in missionary operations, and in all movements of reform. They are not merely devout worshipers within church walls, and decent people without; but, notoriously and eminently, they are intelligent, liberal, and efficient *business* Christians. They *serve* God, as well as worship Him.

CHAPTER III.

CHURCH COVENANT AND WATCH.

HAVING looked at the *principles* of these churches, we proceed to their *practice*.

On becoming members of the church, besides professing our *faith*, we enter into a *covenant*. This covenant is, first, with God ; and embraces the duties of piety towards him : secondly, with the members ; with whom we engage to live in Christian affection and harmony ; to walk with them in a due observance of ordinances ; to watch over them in faithfulness and love, expecting the same from them ; to support the discipline of the church, and to submit to the same ; and, in general, to observe and do all which the interests of the body, and of the members, may justly require

of us, and to refrain from all which may reasonably grieve or injure them.

To *love the brethren*, next to the love of God, is first among these duties. Love is the soul of all. But I pass over whatever pertains to the religion of the *affections*, and confine myself, according to my design, to the *practical concerns* of the religious social state. The first which I shall mention is, the

MUTUAL WATCH OF THE MEMBERS.

We covenant together to watch over each other's infirmities and errors ; to observe each other with the eye of Christian affection and concern, and to give and receive reproof, as occasion may require.

Any member knowing of any thing in another, which is inconsistent with his character or hopes as a Christian, whether it be some impropriety of behavior, error of faith, or neglect of duty, is bound to notice it in a way of friendly admonition ; or to take such other measures as he may

conceive to be best suited to his amendment. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one." "Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him." This was a law of the Jewish church, as well as of the Christian. "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him."*

Positive faults are the first objects of this duty; but besides these, we are bound to notice the *danger* a brother may be in, of committing a fault. If we see him *exposed* to fall,—heedless of the pit that is before him, or parleying with the enemy,—we do wrong to wait till he actually falls, before we admonish him. There are those who through their peculiar weaknesses or temptations, are ready to fall, and that daily, into "the sin which doth so easily beset" them, and need our kind preventive vigilance. Insensible of the approach of temp-

* Gal. vi. 1; Luke xvii. 3; Levit. xix. 17.

tation, or too weak to resist it, how kind then, how salutary, the faithful voice of the brother, who, true to the trust which he has assumed and given, comes once and often, as the case may require, to waken, strengthen, and recall them ! It was such a duty as this, that Jesus enjoined on Peter : *And when thou art converted,*—that is, after thy fall and recovery, in the matter of denying Christ,—*strengthen thy brethren.* The same is enjoined on all. “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” “Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God ; lest any root of bitterness, springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled ; lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.”*

I think, too, that that general state of *coldness*, or declension in religious feeling, into which all are too apt to fall, is within the province of this duty. If we see some

* Luke xxii. 32 ; Gal. vi. 2 ; Heb. xii. 15, 16.

“waxing cold ;” falling off from the accustomed prayer meeting ; no more speaking out of the abundance of the heart, of the things of the kingdom ; “sunk down with sleep ;” it is incumbent on us, I do not say to *rebuke* them, but affectionately to “stir them up by putting them in remembrance.” “But ye, brethren, (should we say to these drowsy ones,) are the children of light, and the children of the day : we are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep, as do others ; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night ; and they that be drunken, are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breast-plate of love ; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.”*

The *spirit and manner* in which this duty should be performed, should be always kind and brotherly,—as far as possible from harshness and reproach. There is no occasion for reproof being otherwise than both kindly given and kindly received; for it is in reality a kindly act.

We should be faithful in this duty; but at the same time it will be well to remember, that a merely *meddlesome*, or *fault-finding* habit, is no part of the proper performance of it. There will be serious occasions enough to require our faithfulness, without our seeking them in the lawful affairs of our neighbors, or in those mere infirmities which are common to men.

I need not remark that it is as much our duty to *receive* reproof as to *give* it. He who *resents* and *rejects* reproof, when justly and kindly given, violates his covenant, and wrongs his brother. “Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed.”

This mutual watch of the brotherhood is of much importance. It is one of the excellent benefits of church union ; and is valued as such by every truly spiritual member. "Let the righteous smite me ; it shall be a kindness : and let him reprove me ; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head." "Faithful are the wounds of a friend."

The faithful performance of this duty has no tendency to promote disgusts and alienations, as some may imagine ; but on the contrary, as it is one of the best proofs of love and confidence in brethren, so it tends to produce and confirm those affections.

It was ever a characteristic of the best men, that they were faithful reprovers. Such were the prophets and apostles, and such, above all, was our Savior. On the other hand, the most wicked men are ever indifferent to the sins of others. They say it is not *their* business to look after their neighbors ; and they demand, with Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

It is one of the important effects of this mutual watch of the members, that it is a great preventive of church discipline. Most of the grosser sins committed by members, are preceded by lesser, but obvious departures from the ways of God ; and if the unhappy wanderer had been affectionately admonished at the first stages of his delinquency,—take the intemperate for example,—it might have saved not only him from a grievous fall, but the church itself from the dishonor and grief of a case of discipline.

There is more hope of reclaiming a brother at the first stages of his sin, than when it is aggravated. He has then more character and conscience, and less infirmity and blindness ; and the private labors of his brethren, which then are proper, are more winning, probably, than the open and formidable dealing which afterwards is necessary. Let alone till the church takes up his case, he is not unlikely to regard its formal procedure as an organized persecu-

tion, a regular setting to work to effect his disgrace; which is a state of mind in the last degree unfavorable to his reformation. The case, at first curable, is become desperate before it is meddled with; and is so regarded, probably, both by the church and by him. Taken up late and reluctantly by the former, it is resisted, or sullenly submitted to, by the latter; and ends as both anticipate.

Our discipline, in too many instances, *begins too late!* too late for the claims of duty, and too late for the ends of discipline. The pledge of the members to watch over the offender has been culpably neglected; and this neglect, though it be no justification, or, perhaps, mitigation, of his sin, belongs to its history, and makes them accessory to a brother's ruin.

To conclude; I cannot but think that this duty of watchfulness and reproof, so necessary, so naturally unpleasant to discharge, so much neglected, is peculiarly

pleasing to God, and that it will be peculiarly rewarded. "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all ;" and remember that you are bound to this, by Christ's command, and by your solemn covenant.

CHAPTER IV.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

THE ends of discipline in the church are,

1. The reclaiming of such as fall into sin. "Restore such an one." "That the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." Gal. vi. 1. 1 Cor. v. 5.

2. The preventing of sin in others. "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear." 1 Tim. v. 20.

3. The purity of the church. "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" "Purge out, therefore, the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are [profess to be] unleavened;" that is, cast out iniquity, that ye may be a pure society, as ye profess to be. "For the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." 1 Cor. v. 6, 7; and iii. 17.

4. The character of the church and the honor of religion in the view of the world. “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.” Matt. v. 13.

5. The preventing the divine displeasure. “For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.” 1 Cor. xi. 29—32.

These *ends* of discipline show its *importance*. But of this I shall speak hereafter.

The *means* of discipline are private persuasion and reproof, admonition before the church, suspension, and exclusion from its communion. No other pains or penalties whatever, such as fines, penances, imprecations, (such as the Catholics use) and the like, are allowable. The New Testament knows nothing of them. The discipline it inculcates is wholly of a corrective and moral kind, and not punitive.

Cases requiring discipline are commonly mentioned under two classes ; namely, *private* offences, and *public* offences.

PRIVATE OFFENCES.

Private offences are those which are of a strictly private nature, committed by one member against another ; and which, being not known to the world, or not publicly scandalous, may be settled in a private way.

The rule respecting this kind of offences is thus laid down by Christ.

“If thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone : if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church : but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say

unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth; shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Matt. xviii. 15—18.

This rule is so plain that it scarcely needs comment. There are *three steps* to be taken; each successive one being necessary only in case of the failure of the preceding one.

If a fellow member has injured you, your first duty is to *go and tell him his fault in private*, and endeavor, in Christian sincerity and faithfulness, to bring him to a just sense and acknowledgement of it. Tell *him* his fault. Not that you are in no case to mention it to others. This may be necessary for inquiry, or advice. But to make it a matter of your open talk, or censure, is contrary to the precept, and tends to embarrass and defeat the interview.

If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother; you have recovered him from his error; and have attached him to yourself, more strongly, perhaps, than he was before; for these scenes of ingenuous ac-

knowledge and forgiveness between brethren, have an effect mutually to reveal character, inspire confidence, and cement affection. If he acknowledge his fault and is sorry for it, the matter is ended. You are thenceforth to remember it only to love him the more for the ingenuous Christian feeling which prevailed with him, (so contrary to human nature,) to confess and regret his error; and to quicken the feeling of your own infirmities and sins, which daily need the forgiveness of your heavenly Father, if not also of your fellow men. Let there be no unchristian harshness, triumph, or contempt, at the time of the interview, nor coldness afterwards. Thou hast *gained thy brother*: let that suffice.

But if he refuse to listen to you, you are then to take the *second* step. “*Then take with thee one or two more, &c.*” Let the brethren chosen for this purpose, be of good judgment, of acknowledged piety, and not reasonably objectionable to the offending brother. If their endeavors joined with yours prove unsuccessful, it then re-

mains to *tell it to the church*. This done, your duty is discharged.*

Being brought before the church, it becomes its duty, in the presence of the parties, with all patience and candor, to hear and judge the case. If the accused be found truly charged with the fault, and still refuse satisfaction, it will be the duty of the church, after due means used, to exclude him from its communion: *Let him be as an heathen man and a publican*; and our Savior declares, (verse 18,) that heaven will confirm its decision.

As to the manner of conducting the trial before the church, it is commonly done by a committee. In some churches the complaining brother is expected to do it in person. But this exhibits him in the unamiable light of a *party* and an *accuser*.

* It is worthy of remark that the word translated *tell*, in the 15th verse, means *convince*, ἐλεγεῖον: go, *convince* thy brother, argue the matter with him. But in the other instance, verse 17, it means simply to *relate* or *tell*, εἰπε: report the simple matter of fact to the church.

I must dismiss this class of offences with two or three remarks.

1. With regard to the *offence*. It must be a real and serious fault, and not an imaginary one. Things of ordinary occurrence, and such as result from the common imperfection of our nature, ought not to interrupt the fellowship of brethren, much less, to occupy the church.

2. With regard to the *offending member*, let it be observed that his refusing to give satisfaction is a new and distinct offence at each step of the process; and especially the last,—compared with which, the original offence may be a thing of minor importance. The original fault was an injury, and perhaps not a very grievous one, to a private individual. But his subsequent conduct with regard to it, is a settled disregard of private justice, the voice of the church, and the authority of Christ. Nor let it be said that he is excommunicated for that private offence alone. It is for the

whole proceeding ; and especially for his last act, in obstinately refusing to hear the church. It is his neglecting to "hear the church," more, apparently, than for his private offence, that our Savior requires his excommunication. For by this last act of perverseness, this pertinacious, if not contemptuous, disregard of the sentiments and christian endeavors of the brotherhood, he shows himself no longer worthy, nor indeed capable, of their communion.

If the offending member refuse to appear before the church, being duly notified, he of course refuses to hear the church, and the church must proceed accordingly.

It may be also observed here, that the offender ought to forestall this whole process, by going of himself to the injured party. Matt. v. 23, 24.

3. With regard to the *member aggrieved*, it should be remembered that his duty is *explicit* and *imperative*. He is not at liberty to neglect the course prescribed, nor to substitute some other ; but is bound to take

the precise steps, and all of them, should it be necessary, which the rule requires.

You may say, if your brother has injured you, it is his duty to come *to you* and acknowledge it. And this is true; it *is* his duty; but if he does not do so, it is yours to go to him.

You may choose rather to put up with the injury, or pass it over, than be at the trouble of such a process. But your offending *brother* is concerned in the thing, as well as you, and *more* than you; for it is a greater calamity to have done the wrong, than to have suffered it: and though you may be willing to bear the injury in silence, you may not suffer the sin upon *him*. He has done a thing which he ought to repent of; and *must* repent of, to be forgiven of God. Not only his character as a Christian, but his *hopes* as a Christian, demand this of him. And you are the person best fitted by the circumstances, as being concerned in the injury, and specially required by Christ, to endeavor to bring him to such repentance. You

owe this to *him*. You owe it to the *church*; the sins of whose members you are not at liberty to be indifferent to in any case, and particularly in this. And you owe it to *yourself*; for your feelings can hardly be right to sit down with this brother, nor his towards you, probably, till the fault is acknowledged, and confidence restored.

4. The duty of the *church* is likewise explicit and imperative. It is bound to receive the complaint when regularly brought before it, and to dispose of it according to the will of Christ.

Such is our Savior's rule. And let us observe how strictly in this, as in other things, the Congregational system has conformed itself to the scriptures. There are systems of church order which are incompatible with this rule. A private member, under those schemes, may, if he choose, (but it is not, I believe, expected of him,) take the first and second steps; but what then? Shall he "tell it to the church?"

But *the church* has no cognizance of the matter. The power to discipline is not in the church, but in the hands of the clergy alone ; or, in some cases, of the clergy and subordinate officers. He may tell it to the rector ; or to “the preacher in charge,” if he will ; but these are not the *church* ; and this is not the rule. Besides, if the church should be destitute of a minister, as often happens, what then ? The process stops, (supposing it to have been commenced ;) a thing which can never occur under the Congregational system ; because the church, though destitute of a minister, is still competent to discipline ; though the presence and aid of a pastor is very desirable.

Is it said that the rector, or preacher, is the *representative* of the church ; or that he acts *for* the church, and in its name and behalf ? The answer does not satisfy us. He is not *the church* ; nor is the discipline proceeding from his *authority* the same thing, either to the subject of it, or to the church, as when it expresses the voice of the brotherhood.

Where the scriptures have laid a duty directly upon a private member, or upon the church as a body, it does not satisfy the scriptures, that another person, or number of persons, should undertake that duty for him, or them. Take, for example, those passages where the church as a body,—*the brethren*, in so many words, are charged with the business of discipline; as 1 Cor. v. 4—7, 13; 2 Thess. iii. 6. It is plain enough that the preacher, or rector of the church, cannot discharge the duty, and exonerate the church; inasmuch as he cannot be “gathered together” for the church; nor fulfill the injunctions, “Put away from among *yourselves* that wicked person;” “Brethren, *withdraw yourselves* from every brother that walketh disorderly.” They only upon whom the duty is imposed are competent to discharge it.

By what authority then has this express and salutary rule of Christ been laid aside? How comes it to have been formally laid out of the schemes in question; and to be

still disused and made a dead letter to large portions of the church of Christ? Where is the "apostolic commission" to construct systems of church order in such a shape as to abrogate, or modify, this *more than apostolic* law of Christ himself?

OFFENCES OF A PUBLIC NATURE.

The following are specified in the New Testament, as requiring the discipline of the church.

1. Scandalous vices, or immoralities.

"But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother, be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such an one, no not to eat."—"Put away from among yourselves that wicked person." 1 Cor. v. 11, 13. These are a specimen of such offences. The list may be enlarged from such passages as 1 Cor. vi. 10; 2 Tim. iii. 2—5, and others. All open immoralities belong to the catalogue.

2. The denying of the essential truths of the gospel, or the embracing essential errors. “Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than that we have preached, let him be accursed.” “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not,” &c. Gal. i. 8; 2 John 10, 11. Also, 1 Tim. vi. 3—5; 2 Tim. ii. 17, 18; Rev. ii. 14—16, 20; Gal. v. 12.

These passages, relating primarily to *teachers*, are constructively applicable to private members. If we may not harbor false teachers, we may not tolerate false doctrines among ourselves. In both cases, “they will increase unto more ungodliness, and their word will eat as doth a canker.”

It may be difficult to say to what extent a person may “err from the truth,” and yet not be worthy of discipline or rejection. *All truth is important*; but not all is *fundamental*; and to some extent charity must be exercised. “Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.” But with regard to those truths,

the denial of which would be subversive of the Christian system, there can be no question. Such doubtless are the doctrines of Christ's divinity and atonement ; regeneration by the Spirit ; justification by faith ; the necessity of a holy life ; and the future punishment of the impenitent. The denial of some of these is inconsistent with " holding the head ;" while others of them make Christ the minister of sin, and are licentious.

3. ~~Troubling the peace of the church by raising parties in it.~~ " A man that is a heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject ;" the word *heretic*, in the original, meaning the *leader of a faction*, raised commonly on the ground of his peculiar doctrinal opinions ; but applicable to any factious leader, whether the division be for doctrines, measures, or men. Tit. iii. 10 ; Rom. xvi. 17, 18 ; Gal. v. 12.

The case here does not respect the *morals* of the individual. He may be very correct in other respects, and even devout ;

but this must not exempt him from discipline. So far from it, the more he has of these fair qualities, the more able he will be, "by good words and fair speeches, to deceive the hearts of the simple."

4. An idle, useless life ; with such unchristian practices as an idle life begets. "For we hear that there are some which walk disorderly among you, working not at all, but are busy-bodies." "Not only idle, but tattlers also, and busy-bodies, speaking things which they ought not." 2 Thess. iii. 11—14. 1 Tim. v. 13. These things, always grievous, and always requiring the private reproofs of the brethren, become, in aggravated cases, subjects for formal discipline.

5. Neglecting to provide for one's dependent relatives, especially one's family, and leaving them either to want the comforts of life, or to live on charity,—whether through indolence or covetousness. This is a sin against nature, justice, and reli-

gion. "If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." 1 Tim. v. 8.

6. Refusing to bear a reasonable part in the pecuniary support of the gospel. If we consider that this is *covetousness*, (itself a disciplinable sin;) that it is *injustice*; for it robs the laborer of his hire, or robs others to make it good; that it is *disobedience to Christ*, who has "ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel," and made it the duty of "him that is taught in the word to communicate unto him that teacheth, in all good things;" and that it betrays such indifference to the gospel, and such overvaluing of the world, as is not far from *denying the faith*, in a manner "worse than an infidel;" we cannot doubt that it is worthy of discipline.

In addition to these specific cases, we have the general precept, "Withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh

disorderly." 2 Thess. iii. 6. What constitutes disorderly walking the enlightened moral sense of the church must determine.

It will be perceived that these offences are all of a different character, and require a different treatment, from that referred to in the eighteenth of Matthew. There, the offence is supposed to concern two individuals, between whom if the matter be settled, discipline is satisfied.* But the offences enumerated here are scandalous and public. They concern the peace and purity of the church, and the honor of religion; and are no more a trespass against one member than against them all; who are all therefore, alike concerned to remove them.

* I ought, perhaps, to have noticed under our Savior's rule, that some critics conjecture, (but not with confidence,) that the words *against thee*, (εἰς σε) should be omitted; being said to be wanting in some MSS. The passage is doubtless right, as it stands; but allowing the omission, it would not materially affect the rule. Instead of applying only to things of a personal nature between members, it would then include any sin which, being done in private, and known only to a few, might be privately healed. For sins publicly injurious, there is public discipline, which the rule of Christ does not supersede.

There a brother is injured ; but here, Christ is wounded, and Zion mourns.

MANNER OF PROCEEDING.

In the prosecution of cases of discipline, much must be left to discretion. Some require a more summary, and others a more prolonged and lenient course ; some may be healed more privately, others more openly : according as the nature of the offence and the interests of religion dictate. Those steps are to be taken which, in the exercise of a sound judgment, appear best adapted to secure the objects of discipline, and most agreeable to the laws of Christ.

Charges against an offending member should be distinctly specified ; and should be seasonably communicated to the accused, commonly in writing. They should be sustained by evidence.* Rumor and

* Considerable embarrassment arises, often, from the want of established *rules* of evidence. What kind and amount of evidence shall be required ? Is the informing member a competent witness ? Are two or more witnesses always requisite to

presumption, though they may justify an *inquiry* on the part of the church, and often demand it, are not a basis upon which to proceed to formal acts of discipline.

As the reclaiming of the offender is the first object, commonly, it will be proper, in most cases, to labor with him in private. As the preventing of like sins in others,

the conviction of the accused? May a series of offences of the same kind, as for instance, the occasional utterance of profane words, or acts of dishonesty, be regarded as proved by witnesses severally testifying to the *same offence*, though not to the same *instances* of its commission? To prevent such embarrassment it is well to have the principles which are to guide us well considered, and embodied in our written rules, or articles of practice. The following are copied from the rules of an intelligent church, and communicated to the author by its very judicious and respected Pastor.

“No member shall be convicted but by the testimony of two or three witnesses, [Matt. xviii. 16] or that which is equivalent: but habits of criminal negligence may be charged without a specification of particular instances; and a series of overt offences of the same kind, and specified in a complaint, may be proved to the conviction of the accused, on the testimony of several competent witnesses although no more than one competent witness should testify to a single instance of offence in the series.”—“In the trial of any case the investigation shall be conducted before the church by a committee annually chosen for that purpose; and the complainant shall be considered a competent witness.”

and the public credit of religion, are other objects to be regarded, it is necessary, in grievous cases, to cite the accused before the church, according to the direction, 1 Tim. v. 20. If he there make confession, and the church be satisfied, to admonish and forgive him is all that is requisite. But if he appear not to be penitent, it is customary, (though some object to this, as having, in their view, no scripture warrant, but I think without good reason,) to suspend him from the communion, in the hope that time being given him for reflection, and further means being used, he may come to repentance. If all fails, his excommunication terminates the proceeding. "This (says President Edwards,) with the counsels and admonitions by which it is to be followed, is the last means that the church is to use, in order to reclaim those members which are become visibly wicked. If this be ineffectual, what is next to be expected is destruction without remedy."

In cases *extremely* iniquitous, or shameful, it appears to be the duty of the church,

as its first act, to assemble and cast the offender out. The honor of religion demands it. This the Corinthians were directed to do in the case of the incestuous person, 1 Cor. v. There were no preparatory steps to be taken.

Some may question whether such summary dealing is suited to recover the offender, and on that account may scruple its lawfulness ; since the recovery of the offender is to be regarded, as well as the honor of religion.

But here are several things to be considered. 1. The objection is a matter of opinion. The objector thinks the case is so. But in the view of others, the immediate excommunication of a heinous offender may be the means *best* suited to his recovery. It may be argued, that this solemn and sorrowful act of the church, expressing at once its abhorrence of the crime and its sense of the deep injury done to religion, while the shame of the culprit is now fresh in his own consciousness, and legible in the faces of others, and while the

judgment of the world loudly confirms the judgment of the church; is likely to be more impressive to him, and to show him more effectually to what a depth he is fallen, than a more gradual procedure. Such was the effect upon the incestuous Corinthian. So long as he retained his place in the church, he repented not; but being cast out, he was filled with sorrow; and was restored.* Besides, the act of excommunication does not hinder the church from still using all hopeful means with the guilty member; who, though separated from their communion, is not to be counted as an enemy, but admonished as a brother. There is no certainty that he will not be reclaimed, being cast out; and there is none that he will be, if retained. 2. Though the reclaiming of the offender be a very *important* end of discipline, and ought to

* 2 Cor. ii. 6—8. This passage may serve also, as a comment on the former, (1 Cor. v.) as to the *manner* in which the discipline was executed. It was the act of the church as a body: and not of its officers alone: "Sufficient to such a man is the punishment, which was *inflicted of many*;" literally, by the *majority*.

call into exercise all the wisdom, tenderness and faithfulness, of the church, yet I am not certain that either reason or the Bible tells us that this is always the *most* important end.] If we might suppose that the retaining him for a time, with all his infamy upon him, would be such a discredit to religion, or so dangerous to the members, as in all likelihood to occasion the ruin of *many* souls, it would seem to be duty to cast him out even to the probable ruin of his,—supposing this latter consequence to follow; which, however, is not conceded. The question is, is his remaining in the church of greater importance than the church itself; and must we sacrifice, or even jeopardize the church, in the uncertain hope of reclaiming him? Grant that he *may be* a Christian, or that he certainly *is* one, notwithstanding his crime; he may not be a fit person to be in the church at present. 3. If we have scripture for the measure, that must suffice; and this I think we have, in the case of the church at Corinth.

It is the opinion of some that our Savior's rule in Matthew is to be followed *in all cases*, public as well as private; and this is the practice of some churches. But in the view of others this is a misapplication of the rule. For, 1. It does not appear to consist with the obvious sense of the passage. The offence there contemplated is a personal one: "If thy brother trespass *against thee*." If it be said that every offence may be assumed and treated as a personal one, inasmuch as it is a breach of a mutual and common covenant, then it is personal to *all* the members, and all ought to take the steps required: which is no where practiced, and would be absurd. 2. The rule, literally followed, does not appear to be adapted to satisfy the ends of discipline, in public cases. Take, for example, such as are mentioned by Paul, "If any man that is called a brother be a *fornicator, a railer, a drunkard, &c.*" A member goes to such an one and tells him his fault in private, following the rule of Christ. And suppose he confesses and

repents. Is the wounded honor of religion healed, in this private way? Is there a salutary impression made upon the church? Is the offender himself deterred, by such easy terms, from a repetition of his sin? No, not at all. An open, scandalous iniquity, blown far and wide by fame, calls for something more than private auricular confession. "Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others also may fear."

I am aware that it is said that the visiting brother may require a public confession, as the satisfaction he seeks; and that so the public ends of discipline will be secured. But still this is not the rule. It does not say you shall go to your brother in private and require a public confession; but it says, if he hear you in private, you are to regard the thing as settled.

Our Savior evidently refers to a strictly personal and private affair, such as is often occurring between man and man, and of which the world takes no notice. At the

same time, this excellent rule is a standing law of wisdom, from which, doubtless, we are to draw lessons for almost every occasion of discipline. It teaches us to regard the natural infirmity of human nature, by using, when we may, private endeavors, rather than the more mortifying and pride-alarming ones of a public nature; and to save religion itself from all needless exposure of the errors of its disciples. It teaches us to be ever kind, gentle, and forbearing; and to use means for the recovery of such as are fallen, as mild, as various, as protracted, and as hopeful, as the nature of the case will admit.

The following is the doctrine of the Cambridge Platform on the subject.

“But if the offence be more public at first, and of a more heinous and criminal nature, to wit, such as are condemned by the light of nature, then the church, without such gradual proceeding, is to cast out the offender from their holy communion, for the further mortifying of his sin, and the healing of his soul in the day of the

Lord Jesus.”* With this agrees the Saybrook Platform. “Admonition is in case of private offences to be performed according to the rule in Matt. xviii. 15—17, and in case of public offences, openly before the church, as the honor of the gospel, and the nature of the scandal, shall require.”† The doctrine of the Westminster Assembly’s, or Presbyterian Directory for church censures is the same.

FORSAKING THE COMMUNION.

There is an offence not mentioned in the foregoing list, which must be noticed. It is when a member improperly forsakes the Lord’s table.

Why is the church to notice this?

- *1. Because the member, having covenanted to walk with the church in Christian fellowship, and in a due observance of ordinances, his forsaking its communion is a

* Chap. xiv.

† Heads of Agreement, Sect. iii.

violation of that covenant. ~~1.~~ 2. There is something criminal in the *motive*, or state of mind, which induces the delinquency. Commonly it is some disagreement with a fellow member; or some offence taken at the church, for some of its proceedings; or at the pastor; or the table is forsaken because, in the judgment of the absconding member, some are found there who are unworthy; or it is forsaken through sloth and indifference; or in the conscious shame of general declension and inconsistency.

None of these motives are very Christian ones: and I fear there is sometimes a worse than any of these. I fear there *are* instances, I hope not numerous, when the absenting member is actuated by *malevolence*. He forsakes the communion as an expression of his anger, or hostility. He does it supposing that it will disquiet the member with whom he is at variance, and that it will cast blame upon him. Or, if the church or the pastor is concerned, he thinks it will implicate and afflict them or him. He takes a course which shows an

assumption of judgment in his own favor, and an impeachment of the other party.

The conduct is wrong, and the example bad, whatever be the motive. If you have a difficulty with a member, it is your duty, not to forsake the ordinances and fellowship of the church, but to take immediate measures, according to the rule of Christ, for the healing of the difficulty. If your dissatisfaction is with the doings or judgment of the church in some matter, upon however clear or reasonable grounds your dissatisfaction rests, your course is wrong notwithstanding ; for it is subversive of all order, by setting up the will of an individual above the whole, or perhaps, of a minority above the majority. You have a right to make your dissatisfaction known, if you choose, but this is not the way to do it. As to the presence of unworthy communicants, if that is your difficulty, it is your duty, not to forsake the communion on their account, but either to endeavor to have them properly disciplined, as you promised to do in your covenant, or else to

bear with them, remembering that there are "tares" in all, even the best of churches; and that wholly to eradicate them, even when they are visible, is often a matter too difficult to be effected. But if all will not do, there is no remedy for you but to take an honorable dismissal and remove—which you ought not lightly to do—to some other church.

It does not avail to say you commune elsewhere. You covenanted to commune with *this* church. Nor does your communing elsewhere help your *example*. It rather proclaims what ought to be hid, nay, what ought not to be. To those who know the reason of your absence, it looks as though you were living in a quarrel with a brother, or with the church, or your minister; or had excommunicated them all for unsoundness, or disorder, having disowned and withdrawn yourself from them, and gone to another and better fraternity. To those who are ignorant of the reason, you appear as a simple neglecter of ordinances. They see your seat vacant in the

house of God, and at the Lord's table, and knowing no other cause, naturally enough conclude that you are abiding indolently at home. In a word, the practice is too sinful in itself, and too evil in its tendencies, to be allowed. It ought to be, as it is, a subject of discipline.

MISCELLANEOUS AND GENERAL REMARKS ON
THE SUBJECT OF DISCIPLINE.

1. It is to be remembered that all cases of discipline, once taken up, are to be brought to one of two results; the reformation of the offender, or else his excommunication. They must never be dropped short of one or the other of these issues.

Hence it follows, that no matter can be a proper subject for discipline at all, (though it may be, for private reproof) for which the offender could not be scripturally excommunicated in case of his persisting in it.

2. Excommunication, though it is essentially the same in its results in all cases, as

cutting the delinquent off from the name and privileges of membership, and is never a trivial affair ; yet, in respect to the form of it, it is susceptible of different degrees of severity. In the case of one who forsakes the communion of the church, but is not otherwise scandalous, the church may simply disown, or cease to know him as a member. "He having thereby cut himself off from that church's communion, the church may justly esteem and declare itself discharged of any further inspection over him."* It may withdraw its watch and care. But in the case of notorious and obstinate offenders, the act of excommunication should be more formal and impressive. It should be something more than to pass and silently record a vote. "If the case be notoriously bad, pronounce sentence at the table of the Lord, with great solemnity."† Some declare it from the pulpit, in the most public manner.

With this the scriptures appear to agree.

* Saybrook Platform.

† Doddridge.

From some they direct us to '*withdraw*' ourselves ; in the case of others, the direction is, in language less mild, to '*cut off*,' '*reject*,' and '*put away from among yourselves*,' the wicked person. In the case of the *very heinous* offender at Corinth, the church was required to assemble, and in the most solemn manner, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, '*to deliver such an one unto Satan*, [that is, as I understand it, to give him back again into that world which is Satan's kingdom, he being "the god of this world,"] for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.'

3. It sometimes happens that an offending member is so uninformed as to imagine that he can *withdraw* from the church at will, and thus escape from its censure. The gospel knows no such rule. It supposes no separation from the church, except by regular dismissal to another church, or by excommunication.

X 4. The censures of the church are to be administered by the pastor, in accordance with the vote of the brethren.

Though the pastor is not competent to act without the church, he is not to be considered as the mere chairman, or as the mere executive, of the church, in the business of discipline. Far from this. He is set for the defence of the gospel as much in respect to its discipline as in any other respect; and the Bible expects him to act and to be regarded in this, no less than in other things, as the guide and leader of the church.

X 5. No member under censure of the church, or excommunicated by it, can lawfully be received to the communion and fellowship of another church; and any church which should violate this plain law of propriety and duty, whether of the same or of another denomination, would be guilty of taking sides with the offender against the laws of Christ. If Christ himself has

declared* that *he* will confirm in heaven what a church does in the faithful execution of his laws upon an offender, it is an act not far from rebellion, it is presumption not far from impious, in another church, to nullify what that church does, and to loose on earth what Christ binds in heaven, by taking the excluded member to its bosom.

✱ 6. The discipline of the church should be attended to *promptly*. It is better on every account, to take an offence in the time of it, than after long delay. Neglected sores are the most difficult to heal. Is the good of the offender regarded? The reproof, lagging far behind the offence, is likely to fail of effect. Is the honor of the church concerned? Who delays, when his reputation is suffering, for months or years before he attempts to relieve it? And is not the character of the church as valuable and as soon to be vindicated as that of a man?

* Matt. xviii. 18.

It must be *faithful*. Every reason which demands the discipline at all demands that it be thorough. "Great care is to be taken that we be not overstrict or rigorous, yet, the winning and healing of the offender's soul being the end of these endeavors, we must not daub with untempered mortar, nor heal the wounds of our brethren slightly."* I have before remarked that it should be carried through, when once taken up. To commence a process of dealing with an offender, and to drop or recede from it without an issue, leaving his sin upon him unrepented of, and the church unsatisfied, and the honor of religion unrelieved, is not only a sin against him, being an omission of those means which Christ has appointed for his recovery, but is disobedience to Christ, proclaims the weakness or unfaithfulness of the church, and is a bad precedent which is likely both to multiply occasions for discipline, and to embarrass the treatment of them.

* Camb. Platform.

It must be uniform. Every offence, and not merely *some* offences, should receive its due attention. That is a badly administered government which is unequal, pursuing some offenders and neglecting others ; or which is fitful and capricious, now negligent and now strenuous.

It must be impartial. No pecuniary or family influence, no worldly consideration whatever, may cover the man of consequence, while a humbler member would experience no such forbearance. Or, in another view of the subject, let not the soul of the rich or honorable man be less regarded than the soul of the poor or obscure ; but let the same means be used for his recovery as for the other's. "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality." 1 Tim. v. 21.

6. All the members should take part in the discharge of this important duty.

They should all sustain the discipline of the church by their presence and vote; not only because this is the equal and common duty of all, but because the efficacy of discipline depends, in a great degree, upon the concurrence of the whole society in it, instead of its resulting from the action of only a few.

7. It is of the greatest importance always to keep in view the *ends* of discipline, and especially *that* end which, in all ordinary cases, is the first to be aimed at; namely, the recovery of the delinquent. That gained, all is gained. It is at once the most pleasing result in itself, and the most honorable to the church and the gospel. It is true that by the excommunication of the offender, the church has cleared itself of the scandal; but then a member is lost to it, and perhaps to himself. But if he be brought to true repentance, and to newness of life; if, like Peter, he weep bitterly; not only is the church relieved from the scandal, but it is the honored in-

strument of his recovery. While an unfeeling world would only have reproached, discarded, and hardened him, he becomes by means of the church, a man forgiven of God, and worthy of the renewed confidence and esteem of men. What more honored instrumentality, what more gratifying result, than this?

8. Too great heed cannot be taken as to what *spirit* we are of, in this matter. If the object be to gain our brother, this is not to be effected by a process of barren *forms*, much less by unkindness and reproach. We must feel and manifest a real concern for his good. We must make him see, if possible, that though an *erring* brother, he is still regarded and treated as a *brother*; and, if he compel us to go so far as to divide him from our company, that it is with unfeigned sorrow we proceed to that extremity, in the discharge of a duty we dare not disregard.

9. The faithful performance of this duty is the truest test of a Christian church.

The apostle writing to the Corinthians concerning the disorderly member whom he had required them to excommunicate, tells them he did it to prove the universality and the *reality* of their obedience to Christ: "For to this end also did I write, that I might know *the proof of you*, whether ye be obedient in *all* things." Whatever a church may be in respect to its creeds or its forms; whatever diligence it may use in gathering numbers to a visible profession within its pale; however costly the temple it erects and dedicates to God, or thronged the attendance there; if it be wanting in the article of discipline, it lacks an essential proof of its being a genuine church of Christ. Ye are my friends, saith Christ, if ye do whatsoever I command you; and on what subject are his commands more explicit than on this? It was their remissness in this particular, that called forth his rebukes of several of the seven churches of Asia; and the faithful performance of it by others of them, that received his commendation.

Finally ; I know of no language too strong to express the importance of this subject, or to impress it suitably on the mind. [The discipline of the church, essential to its purity, is essential to every object for which it exists.] Its increasing, and, eventually, entire corruption, will be the consequence of its neglecting this duty. Sin not purged out, is by an apostle compared to leaven, which leavens the mass. No such church can truly prosper ; or can answer the ends for which churches are instituted. Forfeiting the favor of Christ, through neglect of his laws ; losing the respect of the world, and its self-respect, through the tolerated scandals that spring up in it and blemish its character : it will go down hill decaying and losing its vitality, till little shall remain to it but its name and form to distinguish it from the world. It is no longer a city set on a hill. Its comeliness, and beauty, and influence, are gone. It may still bear the 'banners,' but it no longer has the 'terribleness,' of an

army of Christ. Or, if it should appear outwardly to flourish, as some churches do, in whose assemblies the gay and the worldly find it convenient to worship, some for fashion and some for form's sake, and where church ambition builds more diligently than godly sincerity and faithfulness to souls,—if it should go on growing in numbers, and accumulating materials of some sort, its prosperity is deceptive. “Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” Whatever it may have of the form, it will have little of the reality, of a spiritual society. It will want the simplicity, it will want the fervor, the distinctness from the world, the religious energy and influence, and all that is proper to “a peculiar people,” purified by Christ. It is a field where tares grow by permission. They may increase its greenness and luxuriance for the time, and flatter the undiscerning eye of the cultivator, or beholder; but

what will the harvest be “in the end of the world?”

If such be the importance of discipline, let it be faithfully attended to; and, let not fear or policy prevent. The case may arise, it often does, when to go forward in a thorough discharge of this duty may seem portentous of evil. It may threaten to harass the church with the resentments of disorderly but powerful members; to overwhelm it with clamors; to diminish its strength; or to destroy its existence. But faith is to be exercised here as in every thing else pertaining to the kingdom of Christ. The remembrance that it is Christ's laws that we are called to administer, and Christ's church that is concerned in the consequences; that it is his wisdom that appoints, his authority that commands, his power that sustains; and that, whatever the issue may be, it can never be worse than his displeasure; should be our sufficient encouragement to proceed. There can be no ground to fear that he

will not vindicate his own laws, and bear out his church in a faithful administration of them. Nor let it be imagined that these laws can be dispensed with, without incurring his frown, and revealing, sooner or later, the folly of forsaking the wisdom of Christ, for the timid dictates of human prudence.*

* Very many facts might be given corroborative of these remarks: showing in some cases the decay and corruption of churches through neglect of discipline; and in others, their great prosperity in consequence of its maintenance. Many instances might be mentioned of churches blessed with successive revivals and large accessions in connection with the discharge of this duty. And this is what ought to be expected. For when is a church more prepared to be blessed in this manner than it is in that peculiar frame which is suited to the work of discipline?—humble, prayerful, forgiving, and sensible of dependence on God. Or when is its separateness from the world more impressively evident to “them that are without,” than when it divides the wicked from its company?

A venerable minister related the following. He was the pastor of a small country parish in Connecticut. Six of the male members, persons of influence, became guilty of heinous offences, at one time. He began, with a heavy heart, to take such steps as the case required; when some of the brethren besought him to desist, at least for a time, thinking, in consideration of the standing of these persons in society, and that of their families, that to subject them to discipline would prove the destruction of the church. To this timid policy he yielded;

TREATMENT OF EXCOMMUNICATED PERSONS.

We have a twofold duty to perform towards excommunicated persons. One respects the deportment we are to observe towards them in regard to society and intercourse; the other respects the endeavors we are to use with a view to their repentance and return to the Christian family. We are to *have no company with* the excommunicate, that he may be ashamed; yet we are not to count him as an *enemy* but *admonish* him as a brother. 2 Thess. iii. 14, 15.

and "from that time," his language was, "the church visibly went down, down, down, till it scarcely existed, and seemed threatened with a total extinction. I perceived my error and awoke to my duty; and going to such of the members as I could most confide in, whom I found by this time to be of my mind, I said to them, 'We *must* go forward and execute the laws of Christ's house.' We did so; and in one day cut off the six.

"I had appointed a meeting that evening at a private house, by desire of a poor sick woman whom illness had long detained from our public assemblies. I went expecting to meet a few neighbors only, when, to my great surprise, the house was filled. The Spirit of God was there,—and for those *six*, the Lord gave us *sixty*! that number being added to the church as the fruit of the revival which then commenced."

At 1 Cor. v. 11, the direction is not to keep company with such as are there described, "*no not to eat*;" which some have interpreted the not making them our *guests*, or being theirs; but which is more commonly supposed to mean, that we must not voluntarily sit down with them even to an ordinary meal. I say, *with such as are there described*, viz. "fornicators, covetous, idolaters, railers, drunkards," and other grossly licentious and vicious persons. Some have understood the injunction, "*no not to eat*," to apply to *all* excommunicated persons; but I think with doubtful propriety; for this is reducing all offences, the most heinous and the least so, to a common level, and subjecting them all to a common measure of abhorrence. Besides, the words are applied by the apostle to a specific class of offences; "*with such an one, no not to eat.*"

From a view of the several passages which speak of this subject, it appears to me this general inference is to be drawn; namely, that *we are to treat each excommu-*

nicated person according to the character of his offence. From a member who *walks disorderly* we are to *withdraw* ourselves. He is disowned of the Christian family, and while he remains so, we are to have no further communion or fellowship with him. He is not to be recognised as a professor of religion, or as a Christian. This is a general rule. Others are more specific. Them that *cause divisions* we are to *mark and avoid*. We are to treat them as *dangerous* persons ; from whom we are to keep at a distance, as the most suitable way of expressing our disapprobation of them, and, at the same time, the most effectual way of preventing their mischiefs : for factious leaders are soon out of countenance when they can get none to adhere or listen to them. The same remark may apply to errorists in doctrine. "Let them alone." A member persisting in an injury done to another to that degree that he *contemns or resists the united endeavors of the church*, till they are forced to expel him, is to discover, in their subsequent deport-

ment towards him, that his religious character, in their view, is no better than that of "a heathen man and a publican," while the *indecent, licentious, and abominable*, are to be avoided to the utmost degree, as to our having any society with them, even so much as to eat. They are to be viewed and treated as men whose deeds are shameful, and themselves abhorrent to the Christian name.

In every case there is a greater reserve required to be observed towards excommunicated persons than towards the same grade of sinners who are not of the church. See 1 Cor. v. 9—11, where a distinction is made between sinners of the world and excommunicated professors.

As a general remark it may be observed, that whatever our deportment is to be in particular cases, it should in all cases be such, towards persons under censure of the church, whether before excommunication, or after, as to *sustain and consist with the object* of the censure, and not to defeat it. It were a vain thing to impose a cen-

sure by our *vote*, and then nullify it by our *actions*. It is our behavior towards the subject, and not the formality of a vote merely, that must give efficacy to the discipline.

But while we may manifest no complacency in the excommunicate as a Christian, we are not to forget his soul, or to cast him off utterly from our Christian regards, but are to use all suitable means to bring him back to repentance and to Christ. It was for this very end, among others, we should remember, that he was cut off from the church,—that by his loss of its privileges and its Christian esteem, he might be made more sensible of his fallen condition. Perhaps we should show even more concern for him (though hope be less,) than if he had never sustained to us the endeared but forfeited relation of a brother in Christ.

Exceptions are of course to be made in favor of the common duties and offices of humanity ; such as relieving the sick and distressed ; and in favor of the domestic

and other relations. "Excommunication doth not release children from the obligation of duty to their parents, nor parents from parental affection and care towards their children. Nor are husbands and wives released from the duties proper to their relation. And so of all other less relations, whether natural, domestic, or civil."*

Whenever the excommunicate becomes a penitent, and satisfies the church of the same by a due confession of his sin, he is then to be restored. 2 Cor. ii. 8.

* Pres. Edwards.

CHAPTER V.

CHURCH MEETINGS AND CHURCH BUSINESS.

EVERY church has its meetings for business. It were to be wished that such meetings were more frequent than they are, in most of our churches. The desirableness of them must be obvious to every one who reflects on the variety and importance of the interests over which every church is called to exercise its wisdom and care. Besides attention to discipline, how many occasions are there for consultation on the state of religion and the means of reviving it; for devising ways and means for the support of the gospel at home, and its extension abroad; for attending to the various concerns of the Sabbath school; the choir; the relief of the poor, and other important matters? "More time, (says Dr. Beecher,) should be devoted by the

members of local churches to consultation and social prayer. No *secular* interest so diversified, extended, important, and difficult, depending on the resources and steady co-operation of so many individuals, of different age and capacity, could be successfully protected, and extended, without reiterated consultation. And yet how difficult, how almost impossible it is, to convene punctually the members of almost any church, to attend to the public concerns of Christ's kingdom, and to implore the blessing of God upon their labors."

The duty of attending, punctually and faithfully, the business meetings of the church, may be urged upon every member, on the ground that whatever is done, or to be done, at these meetings, is the equal concern of all ; being made so by their mutual equality as brethren, by their mutual and common covenant, and by their common relation and obligation to Christ and his cause. Though the business can be *done* perhaps, by a part of the members, it cannot be done as *well* as if all were there

who should be. For where responsibility is to be borne, or judgment to be exercised, "two are better than one," and "in the multitude of counsellors there is safety." It cannot be done as well, and if it could be, there is no propriety in some leaving it to be done by others, whose obligation is no greater than theirs. Let such reflect that, were all to do as they do, who might with equal propriety, the meeting fails entirely, the business is deserted, and the cause suffers.

In regard to the *order* to be observed in these meetings, they should always be opened, if not concluded, with prayer. In the absence of the pastor, one of the deacons presides. Every member has an equal right to express his views; and it is desirable that as much freedom should be used as is consistent with a becoming modesty and despatch of business. Yet it is a good rule, "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak;" and, "Likewise ye younger submit yourselves unto the elder: yea, all of you be subject one to another,

and be clothed with humility." *Talkative* persons are an affliction in any assembly.

The meeting should be conducted throughout with seriousness and dignity, as in Christ's presence and about his business. For where two or three are gathered together in his name, whether for business or devotion, there is he in the midst of them. Especially should we observe such serious deportment when we are met to attend to discipline. It is the seriousness and dignity of the meeting, joined with meekness and benignity, as acting in Christ's presence and by his authority, that makes its censures impressive to the subject of them, and commands the respect of all.

ARTICLES OF PRACTICE.

Many of our churches, it is believed, have, besides their Confession of faith and covenant, no *written* rules of discipline and practice; being guided by the few simple and well known usages which have de-

scended from one generation to another. Others think it expedient to have such rules.

Care should be taken in forming them that they be not more numerous than is necessary ; and that they be not of a *legislative* character, but only *declarative* of the settled and acknowledged principles of congregationalism and the gospel. Their province is to ascertain and record, and not to originate, the usages of the churches. We have no power to legislate for the church of Christ. We have no power to institute conditions of membership which he has not instituted ; to impose what he has not imposed, whether in substance or in form ; or in any manner to command or prohibit beyond what is written : we have no authority to construct churches on another plan than his.

The terms of admission into the Christian family are, according to the New Testament, repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ. Any applicant for admission, satisfying us on these points, is

to be received. These are the great essentials, the grand characteristics, which distinguish the people of God from the rest of mankind. Let them remain such. Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

It would seem, then, to be an unauthorized procedure on the part of a church to meet the applicant with *other* conditions besides these—such, for example, as his putting his name to a *pledge*, by which he shall bind himself to *particular modes and movements of reform*. If once the churches begin to depart from that original simplicity in which they were instituted by Christ, accommodating themselves to the shifting fashions of the age, and assuming names and forms unknown in primitive practice, there is no end to the refinements, additions, and mischiefs, which are likely to ensue.*

* If it be proper for a church to resolve itself into an anti-masonic, anti-slavery, moral reform, plain-dress, dietetic, or even a temperance society, or church, then it may resolve itself into *all* these, and a multitude more. And if it may re-

It should be further observed, that we ought as *consistent Congregationalists* to ob-

quire the candidate for admission to subscribe *one* of the constitutions, or pledges, pertaining to these reforms, as an unalterable condition of membership, it may require his subscription to all of them, and to as many more as it may choose to adopt,—till, in the multitude of her new shapes and dresses, all distinction is confounded between the church of Christ and the institutions of men.

The *sins themselves* which are contemplated in these various departments of reform every Christian is bound to abstain from and to discountenance; and *this* the church has a right to expect of him. But it has no right to prescribe to him the *mode* in which he shall promote such reforms, except so far as it is expressly prescribed by the word of God. It may require that he shall give the testimony of his own good *example* in favor of morality and against the sins in question; and, that he shall “*do good*” as he conceives he has “*opportunity*.” So much it may require of him because so much is required by Christ, and is necessarily involved in a profession of Christianity. But it has no right to require that he shall subscribe this and that pledge, or constitution; attach himself to this and that popular movement of reform; wear a particular dress; conform to prescribed rules of health; or put on any harness, panoply, or armor, of man’s devising.

And if he has a right to be free in these things, he has a right to be *perfectly* free, without reproach or abatement of charity on the part of his fellow members. The LIBERTY which the gospel allows to its professors in things not *essential* to godliness, is among its most delightful features and best gifts, and ought not to be surrendered. Acts xv. 10, 28, 29; 1 Cor. x. 29; Gal. v. 1; Matt. xxiii. 4.

ject to such articles of subscription. As Congregationalists we profess to object to *all* human standards as conditions of membership and good standing in the church of Christ. But to what purpose is it that we object to these, if in place of Creeds and Directories imposed by Ecclesiastical Authority, we are to have the Corporation and Test Acts—the pledges and constitutions—of our numberless societies and schemes for reform?

STANDING COMMITTEES.

Many of our churches have standing committees. Such committees, charged with a general oversight of the ordinary interests of the church, may be very serviceable. But in assigning them their duties, care should be taken not to violate the essential principles of the Congregational system. I have before me instances of such committees invested with powers almost identical with those of a Presbyterian

session. To commit the *watch* and *discipline* of the church to a permanent committee, in such a manner as to discharge the church as a body from those duties, is not Congregationalism.

CHAPTER VI.

RELATIONS OF PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

THE Congregational churches, like the primitive, and most of the modern churches, have their *settled* Pastors. A ministry wholly itinerant, or often changing, though it may render much excellent service, is not adequate to all the wants of churches and societies, nor competent to all the good which the Christian ministry is designed to effect. The officers of a church are essential to its organization. It is incomplete without them, and especially without its pastor.

The pastoral office is, by divine appointment, a permanent office in every church ; its duties are permanent ; the necessities of the church and community are such as at all times to demand its exercise. Hence the New Testament churches had their

permanent pastors. "They ordained them elders in every city." And hence the explicit and careful instructions which are given respecting the qualifications and duties which pertain to this office, and the duty of the people in regard to it.

A church, or society, that has no settled minister, has no pastor. It may have a series of occasional *supplies*, or a succession of evangelists, missionaries, or traveling preachers, but the man that fills its pulpit is not its *pastor*. He has not the relations, and consequently has not the sympathies, nor the responsibilities and cares, which are peculiar to that office.

The benefits of a settled ministry are very great. The relation is an endeared one both to minister and people. He dwells among them as a shepherd among his flock, whose voice they know. He is not a stranger held loosely to them by a temporary connection; but has his home and his children's home among them.

He is acquainted with every family. He knows their history, their character, their

circumstances, their joys, griefs, sicknesses. He is with them at their marriages, and at their funerals ; and on many occasions of anxiety, of delicacy, of embarrassment and distress, such as the stranger intermeddleth not with, is their tried friend, counsellor, and comforter.

He is the baptizer of their children ; and with a concern inferior only to that of the parents, and often surpassing that, he watches over their advancing childhood and youth.

He is the judicious friend of education, and of all which pertains to the good of the community ; in which he has the threefold interest of a pastor, a citizen, and a father. He is identified with his people in all that concerns their welfare.

His home is the well known place of resort and entertainment for clergymen and other religious strangers who visit the place.

Being a permanent resident, he is more concerned for the results of his ministry than he naturally would be, were his stay

but temporary. He cannot, like those whose stay is short, light fires, in his boldness or imprudence, and then go off by the light of them, and leave them to burn, or be quenched by others.

He feels a *growing* interest in his flock. The longer he is with them, the more he labors and cares for them, the oftener he is called to sympathize with them, weeping with those that weep, and rejoicing with those that rejoice, and the more he experiences of their kindness towards himself, the deeper does his affectionate concern for them naturally become. I know of no affection more sacred and unquenchable than that of a long settled pastor for his people.

The settled pastor is acquainted with the spiritual condition of his people, as a stranger cannot be, and knows what is needful for them, from time to time, in the way of instruction, reproof, or consolation. Directed by this knowledge, and compelled too by the permanency of his ministry and his unchanging auditory, he of necessity

takes a wider compass in his preaching, and his hearers receive, in the end, a greater variety and amount of instruction than would, or perhaps could be given, by a succession of transient preachers. The itinerant preacher, with an audience always new, needs but a few discourses, in memory or manuscript, to answer his calls. He is not obliged to be very diversified in his ministrations, nor is it probable that he will be. He naturally selects a few topics, and those commonly which are the most exciting, and the most obvious and familiar; and with these begins and finishes his temporary work. Another follows, and then another, much in the same strain. The consequence is that the people, though abundantly and fervidly *exhorted* upon a few topics, acquire but a defective *knowledge of truth*.

It is not so with the settled pastor. It depends on him, and he feels it to be his duty, as one set apart for the instruction of a particular people, to acquaint them with the whole counsel of God. They

look to *him* chiefly for the bread of life, and to him the injunction comes emphatically and solemnly, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God." The church cannot be *fed* as the pastor is required to feed them, they cannot be instructed generally and fully in the knowledge of religious truth and duty, in a few random discourses, however elaborately prepared, or fervidly delivered.

An itinerant or changing ministry can never be substituted for a settled and permanent one without great detriment to the interests of religion. This is the growing conviction of the land. It is a conviction established by all history, but especially by our recent experience of the results and tendencies of itinerant labors.

It was formerly the practice of the New England churches to settle their ministers for life. The relation of pastor and people was deemed almost as sacred as marriage itself. The same is the practice now to a

considerable extent : but there are too many exceptions—so many, perhaps, that the exceptions have become the rule. The practice of dismissing a minister “for every cause” is one of the sins of the times. And it has become quite common to provide for the dissolution of the union at the time of its formation. A condition is inserted in the terms of settlement by which either party is at liberty to terminate the connection at pleasure, on giving a certain specified notice.

It is easy to see the effect of such a condition. Neither of the parties feels secure of the permanency of the connection. The pastor, (if it be proper to call him so in such circumstances,) feels that he is still a *candidate*, a preacher on probation, as much after his ordination as before. And the people feel that his connection with them is to continue only till he can do better elsewhere, and that his voluntary remaining with them is a presumptive evidence that his present situation is, for the time being, the most eligible he can command.

He on his part feels that his continuance is at all times precarious ; that the mere vote of a majority, however obtained, in a parish meeting, is all that is necessary to his receiving the specified "notice;" that the very fact that his removal may be so effected is a standing temptation to any disaffected or restless individual, or faction, to endeavor to secure such a vote; and that all that is servile, timid, indifferent, or disorganizing, in the materials of the society, is available for his dismissal, to such as are seeking that result. And the people are equally insecure on their part.

But how unpropitious is a connection of this nature to that endeared, confiding, sacred intimacy which ought to subsist between the shepherd and the flock ! And is this the kind of union which Christ intended should be formed between his ministers and churches ? Did the primitive churches settle their ministers so ?

The frequent dismissal of ministers is an evil to all concerned. Its tendency is

to unsettle the habits, and, in various ways, to diminish the prosperity of our churches. Every instance of removing one and settling another causes some to be dissatisfied, if it do not produce division and defection. It has an effect, too, to multiply itching ears, and to induce a habit of curious and speculative hearing, rather than of sober profiting by the word. Its effect on ministers is perhaps almost equally bad. It unsettles their minds; diminishes the strength of their attachments; embarrasses their domestic arrangements; frustrates or prevents their plans; and in various ways detracts largely from their efficiency and usefulness. In every instance of their removal it deprives them of that acquired knowledge of the people, and acquired influence, which in new circumstances it takes months and even years to gain.

It will be found by observation that those churches are most prosperous which are least addicted to a frequent change of ministers.

It belongs to the present chapter to speak of the powers and prerogatives of the minister, and of his relations with the people.

Though it is not the province of the pastor to *govern* the church as a magistrate, or legislator, yet he is not destitute of *authority*. [He has the authority of a spiritual guide and overseer.] He has authority as Christ's ambassador, and commissioned expounder of his will ; and as such the people are bound to respect him. I cannot express myself more happily on this subject than in the following language of Mr. James.

“Still, however, there is authority belonging to the pastor ; for office without authority is a solecism. “Remember them that have the *rule over you*,” said St. Paul to the Hebrews, xiii. 7. “*Obey* them that have the *rule over you*. *Submit* yourselves, for they watch for your souls,” 17. “They addicted themselves to the ministry ; *submit* yourselves to such.” 1 Cor. xvi. 15, 16. These are inspired injunctions, and

they enjoin *obedience* and *submission* on Christian churches to their pastors. The authority of pastors, however, is not legislative or coercive, but simply declarative and executive. To define with precision its limits, is as difficult as to mark the boundaries of the several colors of the rainbow, or of light and darkness at the hour of twilight in the hemisphere. The minister is to command, yet he is not to "lord it over God's heritage." This is not the only case, in which the precise limits of authority are left undefined by the scriptures. The duties of the conjugal union are laid down in the same general manner: the husband is to rule and the wife to obey; yet it is difficult to declare where in this instance authority and submission end. In each of these instances the union is founded on mutual love, confidence and esteem, and it might therefore be rationally supposed, that under these circumstances general terms are sufficient, and that there would arise no contests for power. If the people see that all the authority of their

pastor is employed for their benefit, they will not be inclined to ascertain by measurement whether he has passed its limits. The very circumstance of his prerogative being thus undefined, should on the one hand make *him* afraid of *extending* it, and on the other, render his church cautious of *diminishing* it.”*

I will only add, that whatever the pastor's authority may be, in kind or measure, according to the scriptures, it is doubtless graduated to the ends which the ministry is designed to accomplish. It is such authority as is requisite to the highest and best effect of the office; and either to exalt it beyond its proper measure, or to depress it below, is inauspicious, perhaps *alike* inauspicious, to the welfare of the churches. If in the one case there is a usurpation of the rights of the brotherhood, there is, in the other, that want of respect for the office which nullifies its influence. “Those persons who are anxious to strip their pas-

* Church Member's Guide.

tors of all just elevation, (says the author quoted above,) cannot expect to derive much edification from their labors ; for instruction and advice, like substances falling to the earth, impress the mind with a momentum proportioned to the height from which they descend."

There are certain things which have been conceded to the pastor, in all denominations. Among these is his right to the occupancy of his pulpit. It is for him to make his own appointments ; regulate his own exchanges ; and to say whether others shall preach in his place or not. He has a right to expect that no preacher shall be invited to preach, or to speak on any topic affecting the religious interests of his people, without his consent. It is proper indeed that he should regard the reasonable wishes of his people, as he naturally will ; but for them to assume the business of introducing another into his pulpit against or without his consent, is an invasion of his rights as a pastor. Suppose

some mischievous errorist arrives among you, and by authority of your society's committee, or by vote of an inconsiderate or clamorous majority, gains the admission which he seeks; and entering into your minister's place and fold, "brings in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them;" whose "pernicious ways" many are likely to follow, and "by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of." Would you judge of your minister's feelings in such a case, you may consider what your own would be, to see an enemy traversing your field with tares. It is beneath the character of a minister, and subversive of his usefulness and comfort, to share his pulpit with those who preach another gospel, and pull down what he builds up.

It does not much alter the case if the intruder be orthodox. He is a preacher, suppose, of another denomination, or a traveling one of your own, whose piety is not questioned, and whose labors in other places are extolled in the newspapers;

still there may be reasons, and sufficient ones, in the mind of your pastor, for not inviting him into the pulpit.

If it be wrong to *force* his admission, it is wrong to compass the same thing by such *importunity*, or intimations of displeasure, as the pastor will not choose to withstand. It may be proper to express your wishes to him, but beyond this you should leave the matter to him. When you called him to be your pastor you committed to him the spiritual oversight of the society. You confided in him as a good and faithful man. If you have ceased to repose such confidence in him, it is better that the connection be dissolved than that you invade his rights. He may err in given cases, and good be prevented ; but as a general thing, more evil will result from the course which is here objected to.

The pulpit is a sacred public interest which must be intrusted to somebody. If it be intrusted to the pastor, as the known and universal practice, the people will generally be satisfied. But if it be assumed

by others, dissatisfaction, if not division and open contention, will be the consequence. And let it once be known abroad that the pastor's wishes have ceased to be regarded in reference to the pulpit, and that it is given up to other and especially to irresponsible persons, whether within or without the parish ; and that fact, while it declares that he has too little of the esteem and confidence of the people to be useful among them, is a general proclamation to whomsoever will, to resort thither to disseminate their doctrines. Such a parish has no unity, and no head ; and its ruin is neither problematical nor distant.*

Nor can the blessing of God be reasonably expected on the labors of a preacher, or lecturer, who so intrudes himself into the place of another. He who has instituted the pastoral office, and charged it with

* It is a matter of experience that *any* public building which is thrown open to other than its appropriate uses, as, for example, a court house, a town hall, or a joint stock meeting house, built by several denominations and controlled by none of them, is sure to be occupied by all sorts of speakers and assemblies.

its important responsibilities, and commanded the respect of the people for it, will not sanction the intrusion. Nor is the intruder himself, in whatever name or *livery* he comes, entitled to common respect.

If the people may not thrust *men* upon their pastor, still less may they thrust upon him *doctrines and measures*. To require that he shall surrender his private judgment, and adopt opinions and pursue measures which are prescribed to him by others; that he shall allow others to *think* and determine for him, and bow submissively to the dictation either of individuals or assemblies of men, is an invasion of his rights not only as a pastor, but as a *man*. And more than this, it is an affront to his divine Master. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand." Paul though he 'made himself a servant to all,' strenuously asserted his liberty, both as a minister and as a man;

declaring himself to be "free from all men," and accountable to God alone.*

A ministry without the liberty of judging for itself would be worthless,—a servile, weak, uncertain thing, fit for the purposes of designing and misguided men, but most unfit for the ends for which it was instituted; and destined speedily to sink into universal and merited contempt. Neither God nor man can honor such a ministry. Christ has enjoined it on his ministers to preserve their moral freedom, under him, and never to yield it to human fear or favor.

The people themselves have the greatest interest in the preservation of the freedom and independence of the pulpit. For whatever else they may think it desirable their minister should be, it is first of all desirable that he should be an honest man. But an honest man he ceases to be, and becomes a time-server and a dissembler, or

* See, among other instances of his noble vindication of his natural and Christian liberty, 1 Cor. iv. 1—6; ix. 1—5; Rom. xiv. 3, 4, 10, 13.

at best a machine, from the moment he surrenders his judgment and conscience to the control of others, and consents to obey men rather than God.

It ought to be borne in mind, that the great influence which pertains to the Christian ministry has created a disposition, in all ages, to invade its freedom. Wicked men have sought to restrain it by intimidation : while, on the other hand, men professing zeal for God, and conceiving their own wisdom to be infallible, have thought it their duty either to coerce the ministry into a concurrence with themselves, or else to break it down. This latter influence is far more dangerous and mischievous than the other. It has done far more to annoy and depress the ministry, and is unspeakably more to be deprecated. It is an influence which not only ministers themselves are bound to withstand, with magnanimity and constancy, in the name of their Lord, but all are bound to do so, who have any respect for the office as a divine institution ; any concern for its legitimate results ; or

any regard for the personal rights of those who are called to the discharge of its high and responsible duties.

But while these things are conceded to the pastor, there are, on the other hand, certain things which *the people* have a right to expect from *him*. They have a right to expect that he will neither desert nor abuse the trusts committed to him. Their own feelings and rights are to be held as sacred as his ; and while they commit to him, with an affectionate confidence, as the people of his charge, the important interests of the pulpit, they have a right to presume that he, as their affectionate and faithful pastor, will not use the pulpit, or suffer it to be used by others, for purposes foreign to the general end for which it was instituted, and tending to the destruction of the peace, order, and integrity of the society. They have a right to presume that he will not introduce there, either men or things, not *necessarily* connected with the duties of his office, which are known to be

odious or strongly disagreeable to a respectable portion of his hearers, if not to all. And the same reasons which forbid *his doing so*, forbid any members of the society *urging him to do so*, to whom the introduction of such men and things might be agreeable.

The organization of a parish and settlement of a minister is to a certain extent *a conventional thing*; and involves *prescriptive and conventional rights* which it may justly be presumed none of the parties will invade.

Thus the parties are supposed of course to agree as to the *general object* of the arrangement, viz. the promotion of religion. They are also supposed to agree as to the *system of truth* and *church order* which are to be maintained there; as whether the creed is to be Calvinistic or Arminian; and the order and discipline, Congregational, Episcopal, or some other. Whatever is included in the known faith and practice of the denomination to which the society pro-

fesses to belong is supposed to be admitted and understood by all the parties ; and no conventional rights are infringed upon so long as all the parties keep within the supposed limits of the arrangement. Beyond those limits rights are invaded.

When, therefore, a minister becomes the pastor of that church and society he justly presumes himself to be invested with all the customary prerogatives, as well as charged with the duties, of that office. They are his by prescription and tacit consent, (waiving other grounds of claim) unless he is previously and expressly apprised to the contrary, and yields them by stipulation. He may waive the *exercise* of his rights as a pastor in given cases, if he will, but they cannot justly be *taken* from or *denied* him by the people.

The conventional rights of the other party may be invaded by the pastor in various ways.

He may do it by using the pulpit for purposes *contrary to the objects* for which it was erected. Suppose that, being the

pastor of a Trinitarian and evangelical church, he preaches, or lends his pulpit to another to preach, the doctrines of Unitarianism, or Universalism ; or being the pastor of a Baptist church, he administers baptism by sprinkling, or administers it to infants. He may hold those sentiments, or modes, if he will, as a man ; but he may not propagate them in the way supposed, or hold them consistently with his existing relations. The truth and falsehood of the conflicting systems are not the question here, but what are the just expectations of the people? The truth itself is not to be preached in violation of common honesty and good faith.

Again these rights may be infringed by the introduction into the pulpit of subjects *foreign* to the ends for which it was instituted. Thus if the discussion of *political* questions be introduced there, it is unauthorized. The place was not made for that end. I speak of political questions *as such*. It is not to be denied that the great *moral* questions, or principles, which are

often involved in politics, are proper subjects for discussion, in a proper manner; and *as* moral questions, in the Christian pulpit.

Again it may be held to be an infringement of conventional rights to introduce subjects which, though they may not be in their nature wholly *foreign* to the pulpit, are not necessarily involved in a due discharge of its duties, and are at the same time an invariable and known cause of dissension and distraction. Such are some of the agitating schemes of the present day. The *object* which the schemes affect may be benevolent and good, but the *schemes themselves* are human. They do not, like the precept, "Follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another," come within the revealed "counsel of God," and may not be *forced* upon either the minister or the congregation. The parish was not organized, nor the house built, nor the pastor settled, with these schemes in view; and since God has not commanded it, if

they are introduced, it ought to be by consent of parties.

Once more. The people suffer wrong, and their just expectations are disregarded, by the pastor *deserting* or *consigning to other hands* the trusts committed to him. Suppose that in a time of special attention to religion he is assisted by a stranger; and that this stranger, bringing his own novelties with him, assumes that he knows better than the pastor what ought to be done, and acts accordingly. He takes it upon him to direct what meetings shall be held, what measures adopted, who and how many shall be admitted to the church, how soon they shall be admitted, speaks with authority, and is in all respects, for the time being, virtually the pastor. Now can the pastor, consistently with his duty, can he consistently with the trusts reposed in him by the people that called him, and the council that ordained him, stand aside from his office, and give up the reins to this stranger? If the field has been com-

mitted to *his* keeping, may he consign it to another?

Or suppose a member, or members, of his own congregation should rise up and assume that *they* know better than he how affairs should be conducted: may he resign his charge to them? Every considerate person will answer, No! The people did not call these persons to exercise the trusts of the pastoral office, and their doing so is a usurpation. A minister certainly should have the privilege of calling in assistance when it is necessary; but he ought ever to maintain his place as a pastor, and never resign up his judgment and authority and hand over his parish to others.

CHAPTER VII.

DEACONS.

THE office of Deacons was first instituted, as is generally thought, Acts vi. 1—6.

The qualifications of the men who are to fill the office are, as mentioned at the time of its institution, that they be “men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom,” that is, of unblemished reputation, distinguished piety, and sound judgment; and more particularly, 1 Tim. iii. 8—10; “Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of deacon, being found blameless.” Which may be paraphrased thus; grave, sincere, temperate, not avaricious, of thorough knowledge of

the truth and sincerely attached to it, and of tried and established worth. It is also added that they should be men who "rule their children and their own houses well." These are the qualities which churches are bound to seek in a candidate for the office, and this is the character which every deacon should endeavor to sustain.

Their duties are these :

1. To receive and distribute the alms of the church. This was the service to which they were specially appointed at the first. It is commonly assigned to them in our churches.

2. To distribute the bread and wine of the Lord's supper.

3. To act, in some respects, as assistants and substitutes to the pastor. In the pastor's absence they preside at the meetings of the church; and when there is no preacher, they conduct its worship.

They are to have some prominence among the brethren in things pertaining to edification, as teachers and leaders. This is argued from their required qualifications,

particularly from their being required to be men of more than ordinary piety and knowledge of the truth.

“I see no reason why deacons should be required to be such as *hold the mystery of the faith*, a direction given concerning bishops, Tit. i. 9, unless this qualification was to be employed in some manner and degree, for the same ends. In a bishop this qualification is required, that *he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort, and to convince gainsayers*. There is undoubtedly no warrant given to deacons in the Scriptures to preach. But there are a multitude of religious instructions, of very great importance, which are to be given to many persons, and on many occasions, and which are still remote from preaching. Of these the most formal is that class of instructions which are appropriately styled catechetical. Another class is made up of the teaching immediately given in private religious assemblies. Another still may be sufficiently described by the word *occasional*. In all these it would seem that

deacons might with great propriety act : and unless they were to act in these, or some other similar modes, it seems difficult to explain why they should be required to possess skill and soundness in the gospel.”*

From its being a part of their office to distribute the charities of the church to the afflicted poor, it seems peculiarly proper in them to be much in the habit of visiting that class of persons, for the purposes of sympathy and prayer with them, and of seeking them out and reporting their wants to the church.

In regard to the manner of their introduction into office,

1. They are to be chosen by the church.
Acts vi. 3, 5.

2. They are then to be set apart to the office by prayer and imposition of hands. This was originally done, Acts vi. 6 ; and there appears to be no good reason why the apostolic practice should not be followed by us.

* Dr. Dwight.

Such being the place and qualifications of Deacons in the church, they are to be treated with that respect which is due to such an office.

As a general fact the Deacons of the New England churches have in a good degree possessed the qualifications which are required. They have been men distinguished for their sobriety, probity, and general excellence of character. The matter is proverbial.

CHAPTER VIII.

RELATIONS OF CHURCH AND SOCIETY—PARISH AFFAIRS.

IN the settlement of a pastor the church and society act in separate capacities. And in this they must act harmoniously, or not at all; their concurrence being necessary to an election. In all other cases, where their common interests are concerned, they act as one body.

In settling a minister the order of proceeding is this.

The candidate usually preaches for a short term upon trial, especially if he be young in the ministry, at the invitation of a joint committee of the church and society.

The question of giving a call is first tried in the church. If agreed to here, the vote is communicated to the society, inviting

its concurrence. In both bodies the majority decides.

The call, being concurred in by the society, is officially transmitted to the Pastor elect, by the committee ; who are expected to communicate to him the state of the vote, the proposed terms of salary, with such other facts, or circumstances, as it may be important to him to know.

If the call be accepted, the usual council is convened to attend to the ordination ; before whom the committee lay the respective votes and doings of the church and society, with the answer received, and other documents, if there be any, which the council may need.

The parties to the contract, or legal act of settlement, are the minister and the society, or parish. The church enters into no legal obligations, distinct from the parish.

For the grounds on which the church has a separate action from the society, and takes precedence of it, in calling a minister, (the propriety of which is indisputable,

and which ought not to be departed from,) the reader may consult Mather's *Ratio Disciplinae*, and Upham's work with the the same title. The principal and obvious reason is, the securing a faithful ministry. It often happens that the majority of voters in society are not religious persons ; and as such persons are too apt to consult their worldly tastes and interests, there would be danger of an unhappy election. It is true that the present arrangement cannot always prevent such a choice, but it affords as much security as the case admits of. Two majorities are not so easily secured as one. And however the society may vote, the distinct voice of the church, unless the salt have lost its savor, will be for purity and faithfulness. The usage in question is scriptural, Congregational, and safe.*

* This usage is recognized in law. "The parish, when the ministerial office is vacant, from an ancient and respectable usage, wait till the church have made choice of a minister, and have requested the concurrence of the parish ; and if the parish do not concur, the election of the church is a nullity ; and if the church do concur, then a contract of settlement is made wholly

SUPPORT OF THE MINISTER.

The duty of providing for the maintenance of those who preach the gospel is so obvious, that to reasonable people there needs no argument on the subject. As, however, there are many who have never distinctly considered it, and have but feeble convictions with regard to it, while others deny and decry the duty, it may not unprofitably occupy a brief space, though far too brief to do it justice, in this volume.*

between the parish and the minister, and is obligatory on them only." *Bigelow's Digest of reported cases in Mass.*

The settlement is for life unless conditions be made to the contrary. "Where no tenure is annexed to the office of a minister by the terms of settlement, he does not hold the office at will, but for life, determinable for some good and sufficient cause, or by the consent of both parties." *Ib.*

The decisions of councils are also regarded in law. The judicial proceedings of this Commonwealth furnish a lucid commentary on our ecclesiastical affairs. See the volume from which these notes are taken, *Art. Parish.*

* There is also another thing which makes me unwilling to omit it—the fact that ministers, from motives of delicacy, so seldom preach on this subject. There are reasons beyond those which affect the minister, for informing the people in regard to it. It concerns them all to understand it as a *duty*, en-

It is, in the first place, a matter of *necessity* that the people support the minister.

The work of the ministry is such as to forbid his supporting himself; and how is he to live? The Bible enjoins it on him to give himself entirely to his work. The work of the ministry is to be his one and all-absorbing employment, to the exclusion of every secular avocation. 1 Tim. iv. 13—16. 2 Tim. iv. 1, 2. The work *requires* such exclusive devotion. It is enough, and more than enough, for all his time, strength, and mind. He must therefore either live of the gospel, or else leave it, or starve.

If he attempt to support himself, his sacred profession must suffer. There is distraction between the two objects; and either in this or in that, and indeed in both, the man must be unfruitful. The experiment has been abundantly tried; and the result is known in too many melan-

joined on them by the Bible; and where a common burthen is to be borne, it is due to such as bear more than their proportion, that those who are ignorant or remiss should be apprised of their delinquency.

choly instances of a ministry careworn and barren, if not secularized and half apostate.

It is therefore a matter of *necessity*, that he receive his support from the people.

It is also *just* and *reasonable*. For he labors for the people's benefit. He leaves other professions, and his own interest, to be useful in this. Others labor for *themselves*. The husbandman toils at the plough with the expectation of enriching his own granary. The merchant traffics for gain to be appropriated to himself and family. The mechanic sells his wares at a price. The physician sends his bill; the lawyer his amount of fees. The laborer expects his wages. But the minister labors with no such immediate view to his own emolument. *He* alone, of men, goes and comes, studies, thinks, and labors, for the good of others, and keeps no reckoning. He foregoes emolument, spends his time, wastes his health, is a stranger to ease, for their sake. Upon what principle is it, of justice, or of honor, that he should do this and not

be so much as furnished with needful food and raiment? Have they a natural *claim* to his services? Have they a right to *command* them? Not at all. He is naturally as "free from all men" as others are; and has made himself "a servant to all," only at their invitation, and by his own consent.

It is therefore *just* that he should receive his support, leaving the *necessity* of it out of view.

Thirdly, the *Bible* inculcates the duty. It has no reserve or delicacy on the subject. He that calls ministers to their work has taken care that they be supported. He has manifested even a *solicitude* on the subject which is very observable. Under the Jewish dispensation he charged the Levites with the service of the sanctuary, and gave for their subsistence the tithes and offerings of their brethren; and he repeatedly charges the latter never to forget this duty, lest the former, deprived of their only dependence, should fail for want of bread. "Take heed to thyself that thou forget not the Levite as long as thou livest

upon the earth." And again, giving the reason, "The Levite that is within thy gates; thou shalt not forsake him; for he hath no part or inheritance with thee."*

When our Lord sent forth the twelve to preach, he said, "Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass, in your purses: nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves; for the workman is worthy of his meat. Again, when he sent forth the seventy, he gave them a similar direction, adding, as before, that "the laborer is worthy of his hire."

Paul is full on the subject. "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth, in all good things."—"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn: And, The laborer is worthy of his reward."—"Who goeth a warfare any time, at his

* Deut. xii. 19, xiv. 27. See Numbers xviii. 20, 21. Deut. xviii. 1—8.

own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt this is written: that he that plougheth should plough in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.”*

* Matt. x. 7—11. Luke x. 1—9. Gal. vi. 6. 1 Tim. v. 17, 18. 1 Cor. ix. 7—14.

The duty being established, the following are obvious inferences.

1. A minister's salary is not a *gratuity*, but a just *obligation* on the people's part. It is that which could not be withheld without *injustice*, not to say *impiety*. Of course, each individual, contributing his part, should not say within himself, "I *give* this," but, "I do it in discharge of an obligation."

2. If a minister be entitled to a support at all, he is entitled to a *full* support. He is entitled to *live* of the gospel, i. e. to a living, or support. I will not discuss the *quantum*. If an expensive education, if talents, industry, laboriousness, if moral worth and exclusive devotedness to the public good, were to be made the basis of the calculation, he would be entitled to as good an estate as the same qualities might secure to him in another profession. But the minister's reward is not of this world. It is not in houses and lands, but in crowns of rejoicing in the day of the

Lord Jesus. It is not desirable, probably, that he should be rich ; but he ought not to be absolutely poor. "Give me neither poverty nor riches," may the minister say, as well as others. A comfortable support is *necessary* ; something more than this is *reasonable*. He should be provided for, not only as long as he is able to preach, but as long as he lives ; and his children also, till they are of an age to be above dependence.

3. It is the practice of some to withdraw or keep themselves from any legal connection with ecclesiastical societies, because such connection subjects them to a share in the support of the minister, and other current expenses. Let such reconcile their course as they can with honor, justice, and the Bible. They ought to consider that there is both impiety in it towards God, and a threefold injustice as it regards man. It is unjust to their minister,—but that is the least consideration ; it is unjust to their neighbors, who, in addition to their

own share of the common burthen, are forced to assume that, which these delinquents refuse; and unjust to themselves and families, who, of all concerned, are in reality the greatest sufferers.

4. We see how much reason there is for the cry of "*hireling*" against salaried ministers. This insidious cry is often raised by the infidel and ungodly; but not exclusively by them. It has been too often raised by mistaken (but I hope well meaning) christians. But all the prejudice they can raise is laid at once by common sense and the Bible. Call it '*hire*,' if you will: what does the Bible call it? It says the laborer (meaning the minister,) is *worthy* of his *hire*. Let no christian hold this il-liberal language till he is wiser than his Bible, and would have his minister to be more disinterested than Paul.

All denominations of Christians have found it necessary, notwithstanding some experiments to the contrary, in some mode

or other, to provide for the support of their ministers. The Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and others, do it by fixed salaries. The Methodists support their preachers liberally, but in a manner peculiar to themselves.*

5. The *consequences* of the non-fulfilment of this duty.

Whatever these may be as they affect the minister, personally, they are more disastrous as they affect the people. The

* The allowance to a traveling preacher is, for himself \$100 and his traveling expenses; for his wife \$100; for each of his children under seven \$16, over that age and under fourteen, \$24, annually. Preachers whose wives are dead are allowed for each child a sum sufficient to pay the board of such child, or children, while under the specified age.

A *house* is also to be provided for the family of the preacher, and furnished "with at least heavy furniture," rent free; also *fuel* and *table* expenses.

A house, fuel, and table expenses are to be furnished likewise for the presiding elder of the district.

The support of the preacher does not cease with his actual service. "The allowance of superannuated, worn out, and supernumerary preachers shall be one hundred dollars annually.

"The annual allowance of the wives of superannuated,

minister is a man of like infirmities as others. He is as naturally cheered or depressed, stimulated or disheartened by circumstances, as other men. And it should be remembered that whatever loss of vivacity,

worn out, and supernumerary preachers, shall be one hundred dollars.

"The annual allowance of the widows of traveling, superannuated, worn out, and supernumerary preachers, shall be one hundred dollars.

"The orphans of traveling, supernumerary, superannuated, and worn out preachers, shall be allowed by the annual conferences, the same sums respectively, which are allowed to the children of living preachers."—*Book of Discipline*.

I quote these things because it is the idea of some that Methodist preachers live on air; but more especially because some of these provisions, which respect superannuated and worn out preachers, and their dependent offspring, are very commendable, and worthy of the consideration of other denominations.

As to *supernumerary* preachers, I presume there are not many among the Methodists. If there are, the propriety of supporting them I should think questionable. The *laborer* is worthy of his hire; but the Bible says nothing about "*supernumeraries*"—men for whom no employment can be found in the vineyard of the Lord.

The money for defraying these expenses comes, of course, as it ought, from the people—either directly or indirectly. In no denomination are collections more frequently called for, with a view to the support of its preachers, and to other current expenses.

or efficiency, or time, his ministry suffers, in consequence of the people's neglect to provide for him, the loss is eminently *theirs*. The work of the ministry, his proper work, is *to them* the most important work in which he can be occupied. If the deficiency of a too slender support is to be made up by somebody, it had better be done by them than by him. If I hire a laborer to do an important work for me, which shall require his exclusive attention,—to tend my field, for example,—it were better to give him his meals than to compel him to earn them elsewhere, at the expense of half his time. Weeds and a starveling crop will tell me so, in the end.

A people who are not willing, or not careful, duly to provide for their minister, are not in a *state of mind* to be much profited by his labors. There is evidence that they do not esteem him very highly in love for his work's sake.

They have no right to expect *the blessing of God*. If it be covetousness, or indiffe-

rence, which causes their neglect, these are not the feelings which God approves. We have seen that such neglect is contrary to his requirements. He considers it a wrong done to himself. He has remarkably shown himself interested in the just claims of the laborer; and expresses his indignation at those who withhold their wages. Jas. v. 4. Does God concern himself thus for the wages of the laborer of the field, and is he indifferent to the sustenance of his ministers? Nay, doth God take care for *oxen*? for the faithful laboring animal; and not for his faithful servants who labor for him?

He has called them to their work with a scripture provision before their eyes, of support. If this is withheld, he will take care of his servants, but it will not be for the good of the delinquents. He calls it robbery,—a robbing of *him*; and declares it to be a reason of his withholding his blessing.*

* Mal. iii. 8—10—Compare with Numb. xviii. 20, 21, 31.

Finally ; it is no less the *interest* than it is the *duty* of the people to support their minister. It is their privilege to do whatever is necessary to make his ministry among them, unembarrassed, cheerful, and efficient. They can well *afford* to do this, even in a *pecuniary* view. There is no devoted minister who does not benefit even the pecuniary interests of his people greatly beyond the amount of his stipend. All that his influence does to save them from sin, saves them from that which is more expensive than godliness. Look at the parish which is blest with a faithful minister, and at another which is blest with none : compare the sobriety and thrift of the former, with the vices which prevail in the other ; its inebriates and idlers, its frolics and extravagances, its litigations, and many other tax-levying iniquities, more exorbitant than the publicans of old ; and this shall settle the point, that the christian ministry is worth more, incomparably more, I say, in a *pecuniary* view, than it costs.

But what is it worth in a *religious* view ? If it hath pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe, and if thus you and your children be saved ; if while you spare something of your temporal substance for the support of your minister, he is instructing you in that wisdom whose fruit is better than gold, and leading you up to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, how immeasurably are you the gainer ! How much is received beyond what is given ? And how blind, how miserable the policy, which prefers the incomputable costs and losses of sin, pecuniary and moral, temporal and eternal, to the trifling burthen of a minister's subsistence averaged upon the community !

DIFFERENT MODES OF PROVIDING FOR PARISH EXPENSES.

1. The original mode of raising the Pastor's support, in New England, was by *tax*. Meeting-houses were built, and other par-

ish expenses provided for, in the same way.

This mode is strictly equitable. Taxation is graduated according to individual ability. It is right that each member of the community, enjoying a common benefit, should bear his part of the common burthen according to his means. This principle is so obvious, that it is universally acted on in civil affairs. Any other mode of raising subsidies would occasion a murmur from one extreme of the land to the other.

This was the mode originally established by God himself for the support of religion. Under the Mosaic dispensation, and earlier than that, each man paid his *tithes*, or tenths; which was strictly a tax. It was a levy graduated to each person's ability, or means, as our parish *rates* are. The same principle, or what is equivalent to it, is recognized in the New Testament, (1 Cor. xvi. 2) where each person is required to lay by for the purpose of the gos-

pel as *God hath prospered him*; i. e. according to his ability.

For a century and a half there was no objection to this mode in New England, the people being all of one denomination, and sensible enough of the importance of religion to be willing to support it. But as the state of society has changed, taxation for the support of the gospel has met with many obstacles from unreasonable and disaffected men, and has been laid aside, to a greater or less extent, for other modes.

2. A common mode has been an annual *sale, or rent, of pews*. This method has one advantage, as it has done away, where it is adopted, the old custom of *seating the meeting-house*; a custom which still exists in some places. This was a delicate business, and too often occasioned unpleasant feelings. It never could have been practiced so long and so amicably by a people less characterized by deference for public order than the descendants of the Pilgrims. This method has also other advantages.

By appealing to the selfish principle, it secures generally a prompt and cheerful accomplishment of the object. The money is raised, and every body is, or ought to be, satisfied. It calls the people together, and annually revives their interest in the society's concerns. And it heightens the value of a seat in the house of God, in each man's feelings, as he has voluntarily paid a sum for it. What is *bought* is *valued*; and especially what is bought in competition with others.

But this method is not without its faults. It makes no appeal to *duty*; or at least makes but a secondary and feeble appeal to it. Its direct appeal is to selfishness. In that respect its tendency would seem to be bad. The more people are accustomed to be actuated by *principle* and *public spirit*, the better. Appeals to selfishness are soon exhausted; appeals to duty, never. Again, this method does not distribute burthens equally. A public spirited individual bids off a high-rated seat, or more than one perhaps, for the sake of securing

the object, while seven selfish spirits will make a joint-stock business of one, and that a cheap one. There is no mode which is unattended with difficulties. Perhaps this has as few as any. It is not, however, practicable where the seats are held as private property, as in many instances they are, this being now the prevailing plan of building.

3. A third mode is *subscription*. This mode is probably destined to be universal. It was practiced by the primitive christians. It is a mode of which there can be no complainers; unless it should be the most liberal, who, though they have the best right to complain, are the least disposed to do so. The evils of this mode appear to be these. It is more precarious than other modes. It encourages the idea of the support of the gospel being a *gratuity* on the part of those who contribute,—removing the idea of obligation. It draws upon the generosity of individuals, rather than upon their ability, which is the equi-

table principle ; and thus bears unequally on the liberal and the selfish. The obstacles it meets with are those which selfishness always interposes to the raising of money without the aid of legal constraint ; obstacles which are the greater in the present case, as the call is repeated from year to year, and as many of those who are expected to subscribe, not only love their money too well, but are indifferently affected towards the cause itself for which the subscription is wanted.

The idea of a subscription is, of course, that each gives what he pleases. But it should be remembered that the *mode* of doing the thing does not alter the *duty*. Every one is bound in duty, and, in *honor*, to do as much by subscription as he would be required to do by tax. What ! are we such recreants to principle, and honor too, that it shall require the constraint of *law* to induce us to do our part ? This may be ‘*pagan*,’ and it may be ‘*man*,’ but it is not ‘*christian*,’ nor *republican*.

The result of a subscription commonly, and indeed of most other modes, is, that some do *more*, and others *less*, than their just proportion. The former, though not actuated by the motive of the unjust steward, experience the benefit he aimed at. They secure the good will of their fellow men. They raise themselves and their families in the estimation of the community; and make to themselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, on earth at least; and in heaven too, if they are influenced by love to Christ. With what measure they mete it shall be measured to them again. The *latter* have not the consciousness of self-respect, and do not escape the pity and censure of others; though the pity may be silent and the censure unexpressed.

4. *Funds.* It has been the policy of many societies to secure the support of the gospel by means of a fund. Funds may be well in certain cases, and to a certain extent: I will not say they are *never* well.

But as a general thing, they are of a doubtful expediency. To societies able to do without them they are a positive evil : especially where the fund is sufficient, or nearly sufficient for all expenses.

It is a general objection to them that they are at variance with an important principle of human nature. There is a disposition in human nature to value that which is obtained at some expense, or sacrifice. That which costs nothing is nothing valued. God has implanted this feeling in our minds, and himself acts with reference to it. He has so ordered our circumstances, that all which we enjoy, and heaven itself, is attained with effort and self-denial. The bounties of his providence are obtained by labor ; and are enjoyed the more because of the labor. The sleep of a laboring man is sweet. He has regarded the same principle in religion. He made the religion of the Jews an *expensive* religion. It had its tithes and offerings, and sabbaths, and feast days, involving sacrifices of substance and of time :

and as long as the people were willing to make these sacrifices for it, it retained its hold on their minds ; but when they sought to get rid of them, and began to rob God in tithes and offerings, declension ensued, and religion gradually perished. The same principle is regarded in the Christian system ; its author having ordained that it should be supported by those who enjoy its privileges.

But funds overlook this principle. By making religion cheap, they make it to be cheaply prized. A fund is all the while teaching the lesson, and making the impression, that sacrifices are not to be made for the gospel, at least not habitually ; and out of this ere long grows the impression that it is not *worth* such sacrifices : and if it be not worth the *pecuniary* sacrifices, it will not long be worth the *time* and *attention* which it requires.

I do not doubt that parish funds have been often raised and given from very pious motives, and that the pious dead are now reaping the rewards of such acts of

beneficence and proofs of love to the cause of Christ. But in too many instances I fear the motives are rather those of selfishness and impatience of religious burthens than those of enlightened piety. The support of religion is a tax which the people are willing to get rid of. It is to be permanently provided for, if possible, by means of some pious bequest, a spirited subscription entered into once for all, a lottery, or some other expedient. A feeling is betrayed like that of an old colored domestic, who being impatient of family prayers, used to say, "Come, let us go in to prayers, and have it over and done with."

A people released by a fund from giving for the support of religion, soon become confirmed in the *habit* of not giving, and such a habit is poverty itself. As an example of this, I am acquainted with a society which was formerly able to erect an expensive meeting-house, and to support its minister with a handsome salary, and which is as populous now and as abundant in means as it then was, and probably

more so; but having been blest with a fund for some fifteen or twenty years, it is become so poor as to have voted, that "the fund money," which is less than the minister's salary, is all they can raise. Alas! what would become of them if their fund should fail?—Of course, a missionary agent, "begging for money," can hardly be welcomed there; for how can they do for others who cannot do for themselves?

A fund, when adequate to all the wants of the society, *dispenses with the action of the people*. Where there is no fund the question is whether to have the gospel or not. It comes up to every mind. It is a topic of conversation. It calls the society together for joint counsel and co-operation. This is of great benefit. It keeps alive the interest. Its effect is specially good on the young men, who as they successively come forward to manhood, are called on to act in the counsels and sustain the interests of the endeared community to which they belong.

A fund naturally *abates the mutual inter-*

est of minister and people. This may be said without impeachment of the feelings or motives of either party. Such is our nature. When a minister sees his people making efforts from year to year to sustain him, it is a different thing to his feelings from receiving the cold avails of a fund. It is a different thing to the people. They love him more and profit more by his labors, while they are actively concerned for his welfare, and can feel that they thus entitle themselves to his affectionate regard.

And this is among the reasons for a people supporting their minister ; and should stand for an argument on that head. It is *desirable* that they should, duty out of the question. It is sometimes advanced that the *church* alone ought to support the gospel, without calling upon the unconverted. It ought, if it *must*. But so long as the unconverted are *willing* to contribute to the object, they ought to be called on, as one of the best means of interesting them in it. That it is their *duty* to contribute cannot be questioned ; and if it be their

privilege also, as it certainly is, it is not expedient, if it be morally right, to withhold it from them. There is a moral influence connected with giving for religious objects, which appears to me to entitle it to an essential place among the means of bringing men to Christ.

A fund is liable to be *lost*. Then discouragement ensues. The society, like a rich heir made poor, comes to the ground without its accustomed means, and without the *habit* of supporting itself. It cannot dig : to beg it is ashamed.

However, such a catastrophe commonly proves to be more startling than ruinous. I do not doubt that the loss of their funds would be the best thing that could happen to many churches. Instead of indolently reposing upon their much goods laid up for many years, they would then place their reliance, as they ought, upon God and their own exertions ; and would begin to know a prosperity, which they had not known for years. Instead of lying securely and supinely, like soldiers in a fort, they

would set up their banners in God's name, and go forth to action. Action is essential to life. But there must be a *necessity* for action, or—such is man's sloth—he will not act. Hence the little spirituality, as a general thing, of *rich* churches. The lukewarm Laodiceans it would seem were rich as to their worldly resources; for “thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing,” says Jesus in his message to them; while the church in Smyrna, which he commends without rebuke, appears to have been poor; “I know thy works, and tribulation, and POVERTY (but thou art rich) &c.” So the churches of Macedonia of their “*deep poverty*” abounded in spiritual things. I do not say that poverty is a desirable thing in itself; but it is less an enemy to grace, than great wealth laid up in funds.*

* When a certain bank failed, a few years since, in Connecticut, and carried down with it the treasured funds of a large number of ecclesiastical societies, may not the designed destruction of those funds have been among the providential rea-

None are *supinely* good : with toil and pain,
And various arts, the steep ascent we gain.

It is among the evils of funds, that they *give an undue influence to unworthy and wicked persons*. They are a public bonus, thrown among the many, in the disposal of which the veriest heathen in the place has as loud a voice as the most worthy inhabitant. They give such persons a consequence in society which they never would purchase for themselves by their own liberality and public spirit. They sometimes give them an afflicting control over the society. Viewed as an instrument of power, they are a temptation to wicked men ; who if they can find means to get a *legal* possession of them, are little concerned about moral right. I could mention an instance of a society—and it is but one among many which might be mention-

sons of the failure of the institution ? Were not those funds the Jonah of the ship ?—And how is it with those societies now ? Are they not more vigorous, and more blest than they were before ?

ed—where a party, enlarging itself with all the wicked that could be induced to join it, was able by its majority of votes to control the fund and house, and appropriate them to a most unworthy deposed man (to say no worse of him,) for a series of years; a thing which never would have been done, had the support of their pseudo-minister depended upon the purses of those who employed him, and not upon the bequests of the pious dead.

Finally; funds are liable to be *perverted*. In how many instances are they now employed for the support of heresies, in this and other countries? Guard them as you will, experience has shown it to be difficult to secure them from perversion.

I do not suppose that all the evils which I have mentioned, and others which might be mentioned, exist in every case. Perhaps in many instances none of them are experienced. The evils are, of course, modified by circumstances—by the manner in which funds are constituted, by their

amount, and by the habits of the people. As a general thing however, the objections appear to be well founded.

As a means of supporting the gospel, funds, then, do not appear to be the mode which is either best adapted to the nature of man, or most consonant to the will of God. They are of doubtful efficacy to hold societies together, and to perpetuate religion. They operate through selfishness, which is itself an enemy to the cause. The more selfishness is fostered in the support of religion, the more certain it is that religion will eventually fail. It is not selfishness, or the bonds of selfishness, that can hold men together in a healthful religious capacity. It must be *principle* that does this. Principle, and a living, active interest, with looking to God, are infinitely better than funds.

And it seems to me preposterous, that one generation should think to discharge the duties of all posterity. God never designed this. Has he not made it as much the duty and *privilege* of one generation to

support the gospel as of another,—as much our children's as ours? We cannot discharge them from the duty, we ought not to deprive them of the privilege. And, especially, if funds be attended with so many evils, as we have seen, we ought not to bequeath those evils to our children.

5. *Sabbath Collections.* It is the practice of some congregations, (though of very few in New England) to have collections every Sabbath for the support of the gospel. To this mode the following seem to be objections. 1. The amount of such collections is generally small. 2. They induce a *habit* of giving little, instead of liberal sums,—the plates being filled with cents and sixpences. An agent of one of our great benevolent institutions remarked, that he found this to be the fact, generally, where this method was in use. 3. They operate to keep some from the house of God. 4. They take up considerable time, and necessarily divert the minds of the congregation, in some degree, from the

sacred exercises to which they have been attending.

However, I would not discourage any practicable mode of supporting the gospel ; and in some places this may be the best.

MEETING HOUSES AND LECTURE ROOMS.

Religion itself being not naturally agreeable, should be aided with whatever attractive accompaniments it innocently may ; and, next to an acceptable preacher, nothing more invites people to its public assemblies, or elevates their feelings more, than a beautiful house. God himself has regarded this principle. He has shown it in the expressive and beautiful language of the Bible ; in the splendor of the temple ; in the attractive and even exhilarating arrangements of Jewish festivals ; and in many ways.

Congregationalists have been behind no denomination in the number, commodiousness, and good taste of their church edifices. It may almost be said that the trav-

eler in New England is never out of sight of one or more of their spires.

But the zeal of the sons has not always equalled the liberality of the fathers. There are occasionally seen houses which from their ancient and neglected appearance might be imagined to have belonged to a by-gone religion, as well as by-gone age. They seem to stand as a mouldering memorial of the piety that *was*, and a mournful emblem of that which *is*,—decayed and yet decaying.

It is in vain for a people to profess a lively regard for religion while they show no concern for the beauty of its temple. Neither God nor man is likely to perceive it. God reproves such neglect.*

Societies often imagine themselves too poor to build a new house. It is a great mistake. They are in reality too poor to endure with the old one ; for nothing tends so much to indifference, and lean congregations, as a gloomy or comfortless house.

* Haggai i. 2—11.

If you wish to encourage the growth of other denominations at the expense of your own, let your old house stand while they build new ones.

A society commonly finds itself surprisingly increased in ability and vigor in consequence of erecting a new house of worship. By awaking its long slumbering public spirit to the holy and delightful enterprise, by mustering its resources, and interesting many who before were indifferent, or not known to the society as members, it has found itself, at the conclusion of the enterprise, with increased numbers and diminished burthens. The effort that threatened to exhaust its resources, has greatly increased them. All feel a new impulse. The preacher is more animated, the congregation larger and more attentive, and a new respect is felt for the sanctity of God's house and worship.

The *lecture room* also, as well as the church, should be made cheerful and attractive. It should be well warmed in

winter and well aired in summer, and well *lighted*. A meeting, especially in the evening, suffers more than most people are aware by being held in a dim and cavern-like room; where only a lamp or two dimly illumines the locks of the speaker, whose hearers abide in darkness. We are by nature strongly affected by the scenery about us. The cold, the gloomy, the dark, the cheerful and bright, the silent and the stirring, impart their qualities to our feelings. The children of this world understand this; and it is one of the things in which they are practically wiser than the children of light. How does the ball room surpass the lecture room, and the theater the church for brilliancy of illumination? The primitive Christians, poor and distressed, and few as they were, gave the cheerfulness of bright lights to their meetings. When Paul was preaching at Troas, "there were *many lights* in the upper chamber in which they were gathered together."

FREE SEATS.

Though there should be a few free seats, perhaps, in every house of worship, it is not desirable that they should *all* be free. Besides that it is not agreeable to most people to sit promiscuously, it is desirable on many accounts that each family should have its own pew. They can then be seated together, the children with the parents ; and can go to the house of God secure of the seat they are to occupy, without the care and embarrassment of finding one on each occasion. God himself, in all his institutions, has paid great regard to the family relation, and we ought not to do otherwise in our arrangements for public worship.

But while it is not desirable that the house should be open for an entirely promiscuous occupancy, there ought to prevail a most liberal spirit of accommodation towards all who may wish for room. It is unreasonable and wicked that any family

should be excluded from the house of God so long as there is a single slip whose occupants could make room for more.

SECULAR USE OF CHURCHES.

It has been a practice with Congregationalists, to some extent, to open their meeting-houses for other purposes than those which are religious. The practice originated perhaps in the desire which our fathers had, in common with other puritans and reformers, to discountenance that extreme superstitious regard which Catholics were wont to pay to consecrated places ; and also in the fact that their civil affairs were closely blended with those of religion.

How far the practice may be justifiable in the view of others I cannot say ; but to me it has seemed desirable that it should be discontinued.

There is a certain feeling of respect for sacred places and things which is not superstitious, but natural and proper ; and

which it is desirable to preserve and cherish,—but which the practice in question is calculated to destroy. The principle of association must necessarily operate in this as in other cases. When we enter a theater, or a senate-chamber, the very walls tell us of the things transacted there. When we enter a church our associations with the place should be naturally and only religious: but if within those walls we have witnessed the strifes of a warm political election, or town meeting, or have seen the pulpit occupied by a political orator, we can hardly exclude such things from our recollection.

I cannot help thinking that thus to familiarize people to all sorts of uses of the house of God has a tendency to make them less scrupulous about their behavior in it; and less scrupulous as to the persons who shall be allowed to enter it as preachers. To day God is worshipped in it, and Christ is preached; to-morrow it is the place of some secular transaction; and the day following it is, without much compunc-

tion, made to accommodate some minister of heresy. If these, and such like, are to be the allowed uses of the edifice, they had better be mentioned in the act of dedication, and the house be dedicated to God, the town, and other objects. There seems to be inconsistency, if not irreverence, to dedicate it to God, and call it his, and then make it as common to other uses as to his worship.

I would by no means encourage a superstitious reverence for wood and stone ; nor would I object to as liberal a use of our churches as may be consistent with the professed design of their erection. To open them to objects which, though not strictly religious, are obviously related and subservient to religion, may be admissible ; but beyond this their use is questionable. God has said, "Ye shall reverence my sanctuary." Christ was offended at the secular concerns which he found within the precincts of the temple, and drove them out.

Civil communities, as such, have no right to *claim* the use of our churches. They are able, and should be willing, to provide buildings for their own purposes.

PARSONAGES AND LIBRARIES.

As a society will always want a minister, and the minister will want a house, it were well if every society would own a parsonage. It is often difficult for a minister to rent a house, and embarrassing to build. If he depends on renting one, he can occupy it only so long as may suit the convenience of the proprietor. He moves about a tenant at will. That he should be obliged to build, in these times, is hardly reasonable. For it is not improbable, dismissions being now so lamentably common, that by the time he has completed the building, having exhausted his narrow resources upon it, and more, perhaps, he is obliged to leave it to stand empty, or else to part with it at a sacrifice by means of a forced sale.

It is obvious that a society can more easily furnish a house for its minister than he can for himself. Indeed the society can do it with little difficulty and considerable *advantage*. The use of the place will in part support the pastor; so that less will have to be raised in money. And by being the known family residence of the minister, it becomes, like the meeting-house itself, a common object of attachment, and a bond of union to the people.

If, in addition to the parsonage, the people would create a *library* for the use of their pastor, they would do themselves a further service as well as him. Most ministers find themselves unable, after the large expenses of their education, to procure for themselves near as many books as it is desirable, and almost indispensable, they should have. In what way could their hearers better appropriate a moderate sum, annually, than to aid them in this object; since the excellence of a preacher's library cannot fail to add to the richness of his instructions?

The books should be placed in a distinct case, and deposited with the pastor for his exclusive use, so long as he continues with the society ; and should then go to his successor.

THE YOUNG MEN.

Young men, as one of their first acts, on coming of age, should become members in form, of the ecclesiastical society, or, where more than one exists, of some one of them. I will not urge this on the ground of their worldly advancement : though I might do this ; for there is no more favorable introduction of a young man to the notice and esteem of the community : but I urge the nobler plea of citizenship and duty. Not coming forward to act as citizens, they might as well be minors still,—they *are* minors—as it regards society.

They often keep back from modesty ; or from not knowing the mode of becoming members. The requisite information may easily be obtained by inquiry.

CHAPTER IX.

RELATIONS AND INTERCOURSE OF CHURCHES WITH ONE ANOTHER.

THE churches are equal, as well as ministers and members. This equality is recognized in their mutual dismissal and reception of members, in associations, councils, and other forms of intercourse.*

DISMISSION OF MEMBERS FROM ONE CHURCH TO ANOTHER.

Members proposing to transfer their relation from one church to another receive letters of dismission and recommendation to that effect.

When a member goes to reside in another place for a season only, expecting to re-

* See Camb. Plat. chapter xv. on the communion of churches with one another.

turn, and not choosing to dissolve his existing connection, he receives a letter certifying his membership and good standing, and commending him to the fellowship of the church where he goes to reside, for the time being. For an example of such a certificate, or letter of introduction, see Romans xvi. 1, 2. Also 2 Cor. iii. 1; Acts xviii. 27.

If the member dismissed is not received by the sister church, he remains connected as he was, and his letter of dismissal is void. "The church cannot make a member no member, except by excommunication."*

And here let us observe the importance of *good faith* in this business, on the part of the dismissing church. No church should dismiss and recommend to another as in good standing a member who in reality is *not* so, or ought not to be so considered. If he be a member under censure, or justly liable to it, let him be retained and

* Camb. Plat.

properly dealt with, till by his amendment he shall be *worthy* of the fellowship to which we recommend him, or else be excommunicated. Why should one church be unwittingly burthened with the disorderly members of another?—whom they must either discipline, or bear the opprobrium of their names. The tendency of such a procedure, besides its other mischiefs, is, to destroy the mutual confidence of the churches.

The *church* also to which we dismiss a member must be a church in good standing. How can we commend a disciple of Christ to the fellowship of heretics! a believer in Christ to the communion of those who deny the Lord that bought them! Or how can we commend one striving to keep himself pure, to the watch and care of them that are corrupt!

For the same reason, we cannot dismiss a member to the *world*.

A member is not at liberty to withdraw himself from the church to which he be-

longs, without its consent, whether to join some other church, or to return again to the world.

If a member wishes to transfer his relation to another church, for good reasons, (of which he must ordinarily be the judge,) the church cannot, consistently with usage and propriety, refuse his request.

But "if his departure be manifestly unsafe and sinful, the church may not consent thereunto; for in so doing, they should not act in faith, and should partake with him in his sin. If the case be doubtful, and the person not to be persuaded, it seemeth best to leave the matter unto God, and not forcibly to detain him."*

If in any case a church declines receiving a member dismissed to it from another, it ought to apprise that church of the fact, and assign its reasons.

Every church has an acknowledged right to *examine* those whom it receives by letter, in the same manner as it examines

* Camb. Platform.

those who are received on profession. But this is not generally practiced. Nor is it generally desirable. It would imply a want of confidence in a sister church, whose written testimony (unless it is known or supposed to be unfaithful or corrupt) should be sufficient. Some churches however are so circumstanced as to render such examination necessary. In such cases it is well to make it *general*, for the sake of avoiding invidious distinctions.

No member of a church should permanently change his residence from one parish, or part of the country, to another, without taking a regular letter of dismission. This is due to all concerned. As a professor of religion, he is bound always to maintain a responsible connection with some particular church; and be subject to its watch and discipline.

This is too often neglected. It is a subject of growing complaint in our churches; and some of them, in order to remedy it, have very properly adopted a rule, that no person coming from abroad, and neglecting

to bring such letter, shall be admitted to their communion, after a certain time.

COUNCILS.

Councils are the representative bodies of the churches. They are composed of ministers and laymen, each church sending a delegate with its pastor, and are convened usually from churches of the same neighborhood, or district, but sometimes from places more remote.

The occasions on which councils are called are such as these: the gathering of churches; the ordination, dismissal, or deposition, of ministers; troublesome cases of discipline, dissensions, or other difficulties in a church, which the church itself is unable, or indisposed, to settle; and in general, all those occasions which require the advice, or concurrent action, of more churches than one.

They are convened by "letters missive," as they are termed; which are addressed to the moderator, in the case of a consocia-

tion being called, and to the churches severally, in the case of a select council. The letters state the subject matter on which the advice or action of the council is wanted ; and it confines itself to that business.

Councils convened for the adjustment of difficulties are termed *mutual* and *ex-parte*. Mutual councils suppose the existence of two parties who agree to refer the matter between them to a council ; each choosing an equal number of the churches composing it, with an additional church chosen jointly by the parties if it be thought expedient. An *ex-parte* council is a council called by one of the parties, the other not concurring. In this case the letters missive are sent in the name of the party concerned ; in other cases, in the name of the church ; in the case of an ordination, in the name of the church and society.

In Connecticut, where the churches, with some exceptions,* are *consociated*, they have *standing* councils, called *consociations*.

* About ten or twelve.

A consociation comprises the churches of a county, or, in the larger counties, half the county; those few churches being excepted which prefer not to be consociated. It is expected that churches belonging to the consociation will resort to it rather than to a select council, on all occasions when a council is needed.

Councils have properly no juridical, but only advisory power. It being a first principle in Congregationalism that churches are independent, and that each church is charged by Christ with the execution of his laws in respect to its own members, other power than this could not consistently be granted them.

The decisions of councils will of course be more or less respected, both by parties and by the community, according to their weight of character and the object and manner of their convention. In most cases their "result" is "a final issue; and all parties therein concerned sit down and are determined thereby." The moral reasons for submitting to their advice are such

that the parties seldom have the courage, if they have the disposition, to reject it. Embodying as they do, the wisdom of assembled churches without the odium of *power*, of which men are naturally jealous, their decisions are endued with the better efficacy of truth, opinion, and persuasion.*

* It should be mentioned, however, respecting the powers of the Connecticut *consociations*, that there is some difference of opinion; some claiming for them juridical authority. The Saybrook Platform, which is the original constitution of these bodies, is susceptible of different constructions. It was no doubt *designed* to be so, with a view to a comprehension of the diverse opinions of those times. It was openly construed differently by those who framed the instrument, and by the churches. It is said, Art. V. that the decision of a consociation shall be "a final issue, and all parties therein concerned shall sit down and be determined thereby." By "a final issue," it may be meant that the matter shall be considered as settled *judicially*; and that the church shall have no further cognizance of it: or it may be meant that it shall be final *as to the action of councils* in the matter. The parties shall not be at liberty to prolong the agitation of their difficulties before the churches, and to multiply councils till a result shall be had that suits their wishes—a course which for many reasons is not to be encouraged. If the parties conscientiously believe that for good reasons they cannot acquiesce in the decision given, the case must then revert to the church itself in which it originates. "And if any pastor and church doth *obstinately* refuse" a due regard to

ASSOCIATIONS.

These are composed of ministers alone.
They meet statedly for mutual counsel,

the decision of the council, "they shall, after due patience, be reputed guilty of scandalous contempt."

From a view of the several articles of the instrument which concern this question, and still more from the history of those times, this latter construction appears to be *authorized*, if not demanded. The great evil which it was designed to remedy, and which *has been* remedied, by the consociation plan, was the calling of successive councils to revise and reverse the doings of one another. "As there was no general rule for the calling of councils," says Trumbull, [Hist. Conn. Vol. I. c. xix.] council was called against council, and opposite results were given upon the same cases, to the reproach of councils and the wounding of religion. Aggrieved churches and brethren were discouraged, as in this way their case seemed to be without remedy. There was no such thing, in this way, as bringing their difficulties to a final issue."

Whichever construction be adopted, a judicial power in councils is at least inconsistent with a fundamental principle in Congregationalism—the self-government of the churches; and the general practice, in Connecticut as well as elsewhere, agrees with this view of the subject.

The plan of consociations was discussed in Massachusetts many years previous to its adoption in Connecticut. Many of the ministers were for it: and a general synod at Boston in 1662 gave its opinion in favor of it. But owing partly to the jealousy of the churches, whose experience in England had made them averse to the least semblance of ecclesiastical power, and still more perhaps to its being mixed up and embar-

sympathy, and prayer. They consult together respecting their personal difficulties

rassed with other and very unpopular subjects, particularly that of the baptism of the children of unregenerate parents, the plan was not adopted. It has been proposed and agitated at different times since, particularly in the western counties, but without success.

The operation of the plan in Connecticut appears to have been eminently salutary. And a conviction of this, it is believed, is gradually drawing into it, the few pastors and churches which heretofore have not been consociated.

Without, however, instituting a comparison between these and Select councils, I will state what are conceived to be some of the advantages of consociations.

1. They have entirely done away with the evil which they were originally designed to remedy, the calling of council against council.

2. They are, virtually, always a *mutual* council; for though the consociation may be *called* by a party, it is never *created* by a party. They are formed without reference to specific cases, or parties. The consequence is, that an *ex-parte* council is a thing nearly unknown in Connecticut.

3. Being permanent bodies, they can have their established and known rules of proceeding, and their permanent and accessible records.

4. They bring the churches into a more practical union with one another, and bind them in closer bonds.

5. So long as the churches themselves are not corrupt they furnish, as ordaining councils, as well as in other ways, a considerable protection to the churches against the intrusion of heresy.

6. Their stated annual meetings furnish convenient opportunities for consultation and hearing addresses in relation to missionary and other benevolent objects.

and duties as pastors, and respecting the interests of their churches ; and make it a part of their business to devise, recommend, and execute useful plans.

It is expected that all ministers will be connected with these bodies ; but it is not perhaps strictly *required*, and there are instances of ministers not associated.

It is the province of associations to license candidates for the ministry.

The minor associations are composed of the ministers of a county, or smaller district. The General, or State Associations are composed of delegates from these.

DISCIPLINE OF MINISTERS.

In case of improper conduct in a minister, it is the duty of the association to which he belongs to take notice of it. The following is the direction in such cases, of the Saybrook Platform, and is, so far as I know, the general usage. “The said associated Pastors shall take notice of any among themselves that may be accused of

scandal or heresy, unto or cognizable by them, examine the matter carefully, and if they find just occasion, shall direct to the calling of the council, where such offenders shall be duly proceeded against."

As an association has a right to inquire respecting the conduct of members, it has, of course, a right to reprove and admonish them, if the case so require.

No *settled* minister is deposed except by a council. In the case of an *unsettled* minister, it has been assumed by some that he may be formally tried and deposed by the association alone. The correctness of this is doubtful. If he was ordained by a council he should be deposed by a council; since only the power which makes, or an equivalent one, would seem to be competent to unmake. If however the accused be an *evangelist*, who was ordained by an association (which is itself a questionable procedure, as it appears to me) he may doubtless be deposed by the same. It is a general law in respect to the conferring

of office, that the power which makes may unmake.

But though an association is not competent to depose a minister, in form, it may do that which is virtually equivalent. It may declare him to have forfeited his standing with his brethren, and publish him as unworthy of the public confidence : and that act will generally close all pulpits against him, as far as it is known. Such is the confidence which is generally reposed in these bodies as the guardians of the purity of the ministry, that when a minister forfeits the confidence of his brethren, he loses that of the churches.

What is a *church* to do, or what is the part it has to act, in case its pastor becomes heretical or scandalous ? Its members, and especially its officers, may, and doubtless ought to converse with him in a serious and respectful manner on the subject ; and if they deem the case of sufficient magnitude, it would seem to be their duty, according to the foregoing paragraphs, to apprise the association of it, if that be neces-

sary, that they may take such steps in regard to it as the case requires; or if the pastor be not associated, which seldom happens, it may be their duty to call a council. In what *mode* they shall do this, will commonly be pointed out by circumstances. It will be well, in most cases, to take advice of judicious neighboring ministers.*

It has been held by some, and especially among the earlier Congregationalists, that a pastor is directly amenable, in his official character, to the church of which he is the pastor; and that the church is competent to arraign and depose him. And this, *with an important modification*, is quoted as

* I do not see how a church in such circumstances, or at least in certain *supposable* circumstances, can act in its *collective* capacity at all. Who is to *convene* the church? and who is to *preside*? The pastor may refuse to convene it; and if it do convene, may claim to act as its moderator by virtue of his office, [Cam. Plat. c. x. § 8.] and in that capacity, if he be a bad man, may effectually embarrass its proceedings. In such an emergency, if it ever arise, (and I have known instances nearly analogous) the members, a part or all of them, may act as *aggrieved brethren*, and have recourse in that character to the association, or a council.

the doctrine of the Cambridge Platform. (Chap. X. § 6.) The modifying clause is the following : "*the council of other churches, where it may be had, directing thereto ;*" which is as much as to say that a church may *not* proceed to the trial and deposition of its minister without a council, where a council may be had ; though in *theory* (according to the old doctrine of *strict independency*,) and in an *isolated* condition *practically*, it might be competent to do so. The Saybrook Platform is constructively, if not directly, opposed to the doctrine. (Arts. III and XIII.)

If a church has power to *depose*, it has power also to *ordain*. And indeed this doctrine of a deposing power in laymen originally grew out of the assumption of the right of lay ordination ; an assumption which never proceeded far, even among the most rigid Independents. It is not agreeable to Congregational usage, and is contrary to the scriptures. 1 Tim. iv, 14 ; v. 22 ; Acts xiii. 3.

A church would, in most cases, find it a

most embarrassing and unsafe business to undertake the discipline of its minister. It is wisely relieved from such a duty.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP OF MINISTERS.

It may be proper to inquire here respecting the church membership of ministers. It is insisted on by some that a minister shall be a member of the church of which he is the pastor, and subject like any other member to its watch and discipline. But neither the reasons, nor the passages from scripture, which are adduced in support of the position, are satisfactory ; and by the great majority of the denomination it is not, I believe, admitted.*

* See Upham's *Ratio Disciplinae*, Chap. XIV. "It is settled, (says the author of that very valuable work) both in principle and practice, that the minister is accountable to his church," first, "in virtue of his membership," and secondly, "in virtue of his pastoral engagements ;" and that "no person becomes the minister of a church without also transferring his relationship and becoming a member of the same." Mr. Upham must have been misled by the practice, probably, of his own vicinity ; or by some of the early writers whom he consulted. As it regards the great body of the denomination, it is believed that the *contrary* is "settled, both in principle and practice."

It seems inconsistent with the relations the pastor sustains to the church as one whom the Holy Ghost hath made its overseer, and with the respect which is required to be paid to him for his office's sake, that he should be subject to its watch and oversight *in the same manner* as any other member.

If he is to all intents a private member, just as the others are, then every precept of the New Testament which concerns *them* as members, concerns *him* in like manner. But there are many passages obligatory on them which it would be difficult to apply to him. For example, 1 Thess. v. 12, 13; Heb. xiii. 17. Who is it whom he, as member of the church, is required to "know," to "obey," and "submit" to, as being "over him in the Lord?" It will be admitted that his circumstances as a pastor necessarily render these and similar precepts inapplicable to him; and that, so far as they are concerned, he does not sustain the character and responsibilities of a private member. We have only

to carry the admission a little farther to say that his character as a pastor *entirely removes* him from that of a private member. The truth is, as it appears to me, that while those precepts which respect mankind as *moral beings* are alike obligatory on ministers and members, as they are on *all men*, of whatsoever grade or condition, those which respect their *relations to the church*, regard them as being in distinct capacities, and in different ways responsible. Their relations are such, respectively, that the two characters cannot, with any appearance of congruity, be united, practically, in the same person. Such is the natural impression left on the mind from a perusal of the scriptures, as they speak of the relations and duties of the two conditions; and such obviously is the propriety of things.

When a minister ceases to be a minister, he then, as I suppose, reverts to his former condition as a private member, and becomes, in that character, amenable to the church to which he belongs: it may be

that of which he was the pastor, or some other. It is a matter of indifference, if the above reasoning be correct, of *what* church he is a member, whether his own or another: it does not affect his relations as a minister.*

I must observe further, that the requisition in question, is an *unnecessary* precaution. That a minister shall be formally

* A minister is always a member, nominally, of *some* church; either of that in which he first made a profession, or of another to which he last transferred his relationship. If owing to distance, or other circumstances, it is impracticable for that church to act in relation to his church standing, after he is silenced as a preacher, he may be received, or acknowledged, as a member by the church where he resides, by recommendation of the council, or perhaps of his association, on proper evidence of his repentance; agreeably to the following minute of the General Association of Connecticut. "If a minister has been deposed for crime, and afterwards gives evidence of penitence, the ecclesiastical body by whom he was deposed may restore him to all the prerogatives of a minister of Christ, or recommend that he be admitted to the privileges only of a private member of the church, according to the aggravations of the case." [*Minutes*, 1837.] It would seem, from this quotation, to be the opinion of the Association that a minister by virtue of his ordination ceases to be a church member *anywhere*, and being deposed, can become a member only by being received as such by some church, on his profession of penitence. And perhaps this is the true doctrine.

subjected to the watch and care of his own church, that he shall be required to become a member *for this very purpose*, while it exposes him to the impertinent annoyances of weak, or officious and ill disposed brethren, (to which under *any* circumstances he is sufficiently exposed perhaps) *adds nothing to the safeguards of his character*. The church has a much higher guaranty for the rectitude of his conduct in his official character and responsibilities than it can have in its own supervision. A minister, as such, is under far higher obligations to a holy life, and far stronger motives, than he is as a church member; and if those are not sufficient to restrain him from iniquity, what will the weaker restraints of the watch and care of the brotherhood be but the spider's web?

Leave a minister to the watch and discipline of his peers. This is the common privilege of the brotherhood, and ought to be his. His brethren in office will, for various reasons, be far less likely to sustain or countenance him in case he becomes

corrupt than a church would be. Respect for their own character, as well as their public obligations, forbid their doing so.

I hope not to be misunderstood. I claim, in the above remarks, no exemption for the minister from any of the moral duties of Christianity ; no right to lord it over God's heritage ; and would by no means create an unnatural distance between him and the people of his charge. The relations of pastor and people are of the most intimate and endearing kind, and ought mutually to lead to the most free and affectionate intercourse. I desire only to free the pastoral office from those impositions which tend to embarrass it, and are of human origin.

CHAPTER X.

DEPORTMENT TOWARDS OTHER DENOMINATIONS.

THE division of the followers of Christ into sects, as they are at present, is a matter much to be lamented, and one which calls for the serious and prayerful consideration of all christians. The causes, evils, and remedies of these divisions, are quite too large a subject, (if it were a pertinent one,) for these pages ; and too large a subject probably, to be soon compassed by human wisdom. The church of Christ was originally one body ; and I cannot doubt that it will be again restored to unity,—in effect, if not in form. In what manner it may be difficult to see.

Meantime, as different denominations do, and will exist, it becomes an important question what should be our deportment towards those who differ from us. And,

- ✕ 1. We should cheerfully allow them the same liberty of opinion and of conscience, and the same freedom of discussion and dissemination of their sentiments, which we claim for ourselves. Intolerance is no part of christianity.
- ✕ 2. We should be willing to see and appreciate whatever of excellence they do possess; and should own them as fellow disciples, so far as they appear truly to possess and exemplify the christian spirit. We should admit their *virtues*, though we may not be able to admit their *pretensions*, and ought not to countenance their errors.
- ✕ 3. We should scrupulously refrain from *misrepresenting* either their doctrine or their practice. "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." And though we may see much in them to disapprove of and regret, yet we should exercise as much of that charity as we can, (consistently with fidelity to Christ and to souls,) 'which envieth not, thinketh no evil, believeth all things, hopeth all things.'
- ✕ 4. We should use no endeavors to *prose-*

lyte away their people,—provided we have reason to believe that they have truth and godliness enough among them to save souls. From any decidedly *heretical* communion, where souls are certain to be destroyed, I would think it not only lawful, but a duty, to draw away as many as by honest means I could, as brands out of the burning; but I would entice none from any evangelical preacher, church, or family. “Thou shalt not steal.” “Thou shalt not covet.” Dr. Doddridge acted both upon the divine command, and a common sentiment of honor among men, in the injunction which he habitually gave to his theological pupils, to “avoid every thing which looks like sheep-stealing.”

But, on the other hand,

1. We have a right to prefer our own belief and order to those of other communions,—provided we have taken suitable pains to inform ourselves, and are intelligent and conscientious in our preference. It is no breach of charity to read and understand the Bible for ourselves.

- X. 2. We have a right to *show* our preference by adhering to our own communion with pious constancy, and taking our children and friends with us. It is what we *ought* to do, in obedience to our convictions.
- X. 3. Though we should be forbearing and charitable towards other denominations, it is not incumbent on us directly to *build them up* to the pulling down of ourselves. We need not, out of a false charity, extol their doctrines, ways, or preachers, in disparagement of our own; nor is it our duty to forsake our own assemblies to encourage theirs;—especially when we have reason to believe that they have set up their meetings, or are conducting them, with proselyting designs. If we do honestly believe that they are more right than we are, the ingenuous course is to join them and belong to their fraternity. But if we have no such conviction, it is the part of consistency and duty to be steadfast where we are. Let us search the Scriptures, prayerfully and diligently, for the right way; and having found it, let us be settled; and not be

moved out of our places by every sound of novelty, and carried about by every wind of doctrine.

X 4. It cannot be wrong, when attempts are made illicitly to draw away our members, to endeavor, by suitable means, to prevent them. If we honestly believe that the truth is with us, we cannot be willing that our children and fellow-worshippers should be alienated from us. We love our own, and cannot wish either that they should be estranged from our acquaintance, or lost to our privileges. And if, moreover, we are persuaded that the denomination with which we are connected, is more valuable for its influence on the community, and the world, than others which would gain converts from it ; if we believe it to be more faithful in its exertions to repress vice, and to promote intelligence and virtue among men ; that it is more instructive, scriptural, and energetic in its sermons ; and that it is doing more in the great work of sending abroad the gospel into all the earth ; we cannot, as christians or as men,

wish that its numbers should be diminished, or its influence curtailed.

The ways of proselytism are many. It would be neither a grateful, nor a very easy task to specify them all : the following are some of the most common ; and they need only to be mentioned to show how little they truly have to do with the spirit and objects of the gospel.

(1.) *Flattery*. There are individuals who, though they cannot be won to Christ by faithful dealing with their souls, can be won to a party in religion by assiduous flattering attentions. The convert and the converters, in such cases, commonly, are alike worthy of the means employed, and of the fellowship thus formed.

(2.) *Prejudice*. One of the most effective modes of exciting prejudice against our own and some other denominations, is to misrepresent their doctrines. How many odious things have been called "*Calvinism!*" and published as such for popular effect. The "*doctrines of grace,*" as

they have been called, the doctrines which were embraced by the great body of the Reformers of the sixteenth century,—as their harmonious Confessions show,—embody more of the truth and power of the gospel, and have done, and are doing, more for the renovation of the world, intellectually and morally, than all other schemes beside,—as facts declare. But those doctrines, *because* of their truth and power, are not agreeable to the natural heart; which hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest its deeds should be reproved,—which hates especially God's sovereignty and man's dependence: and nothing is easier than to excite that natural prejudice of the heart into active odium and disaffection towards both the truth and those who hold it; especially when a little distortion is resorted to, and when, moreover, the attempt is made, under an appearance of zeal for God and charity to souls. How often have pious Arminians and open infidels been collaborators in a work of this kind, though not associates,—

assailing the same "walls of strength" with the same carnal weapons ; though on opposite sides !

How ungrateful a thing it is, to be obliged to defend the truth of God against both friends and foes. But this we are often called to do. The writer of these pages has seen copies of the "Saybrook Platform," (meaning the *Confession* attached to the Platform,) printed a hundred years ago, privily circulated among the members of a Congregational Society, he is ashamed to say by *preachers*, for the perusal of converts and inquirers, during a revival, having certain passages underscored, and with exclamation points and other significant notes affixed, together with verbal comments, designed to mislead the simple ; and with these insidious *constructions* on them, declared to be the faith which we inculcate and require. A similar use is made of that Confession and of the Assembly's Catechism by allusions to them in pulpits. Does Religion need such practices as these ?—such bad means to her

good ends? *Non tali auxilio*, not such aid to her holy cause, *nec defensoribus istis!*

(3.) *High Church pretensions*; such as claiming to be the only true church; having the true order and succession; whose ordinances are alone valid; and consigning all without its pale—churches, ministers, and all, along with the common world, to “uncovenanted mercy;”—in a word, advertising passengers that “we are the only safe ship.”

(4.) *By troubling tender consciences about modes and forms.* As an example of this, how many young converts, and even unconverted persons under concern of mind, have been embarrassed, and distressed, and kept halting, by an officious obtrusion on them of a certain mode of baptism as indispensable to a due obedience to Christ. How often is the question put, Are you not going to follow Christ into the water? when the real question is, Are you not going to unite with us?

(5.) *Appeals to selfishness:* “Come with us, and you shall have nothing to pay!”

That is, come with us, and we will exempt you from that which Christ has made your duty, Gal. vi. 6—8.

(6.) *Favoring disaffection.* All societies of men, religious as well as others, will sometimes fall into disagreements about the management of their affairs. When such things happen in parishes, then is the time to introduce, or to build up, another denomination! How easy is it to gain the confidence of a party to a quarrel! “See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee. Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice!” Indeed, how easy it is, —but how ungenerous!—to pull down a house already divided against itself, and out of its ruins to build another!

Another case in which the disaffected are encouraged, is when a member of the church is under its censure. We sometimes see such an one received, listened

to, and soothed, by those who would seem to be glad of a convert, of whatever character, and by whatever means obtained.

Such are the arts of proselyting. How little creditable are they to religion !

To preach the gospel according to one's own convictions of it, however earnestly or abundantly, to all who are disposed to hear, is what no one can reasonably object to. *That* is not proselytism : it is honest duty. Let such zeal be as successful as it will. So far as the simple force of the truth which any denomination holds and teaches, so far as their good example and the blessing of God prosper them, let them be prospered. Every Christian must rejoice : for such success is success to the cause of Christ. But the simple zeal of making *proselytes to a sect*,—invading established and peaceful congregations and creeping into houses, with arts of flattery and seduction, cannot be too much reprobated.

5. Though it is “good and pleasant for brethren to dwell together in unity,” yet there are some *modes* of union, which, as the feelings of sects are, do not seem to be, advisable.

One such mode is the building of *union meeting houses*. The plan is, for the several denominations of a place, they being too few to build several houses, to unite together in the erection of one for their common use, to be occupied in turns. Now this *appears* well; and if they all could truly rise above their sectarian feelings, and *keep* above them, it would be the happiest thing they could do. But it too generally happens that jealousies begin to arise; and contentions follow, with other unpleasant consequences. “Yonder,” said my informant, as I was passing a small village at the west, pointing to a handsome building, but now apparently neglected, and storm-worn through want of painting,—“Yonder is a church which was built by three denominations. They begun and finished it in much good feeling, but soon got into a

quarrel about the occupancy of it, till finally it is occupied by none of them, but is fallen into the hands of the Universalists, and is used by them and by any body that comes along." Such is the history of one *joint-stock* meeting house.

Another union measure of questionable expediency is the temporary union of different denominations during a revival. This may be well in particular cases; but generally, so far as my own limited observation of the results of such unions enables me to judge, the measure does not appear to be best. The union is avowedly but temporary: it is entered into in the known expectation of soon dissolving it. Therefore, the *principle* of union cannot be very deep: it is a superficial feeling, though not altogether insincere. If it were that love, "strong as death," which "many waters cannot quench, nor floods drown," the union would be permanent. And as to the *motive* which induces the union, since it is known that the parties mutually expect to

separate, and probably *with increase*, the motive will *look* questionable, however disinterested in reality it may be. As a *display of charity and good feeling*, therefore, (for which we hear them commended,) such comminglings do not appear to be very valuable—especially if the parties do not separate as amicably as they came together. They might have found quite as many means of mutual courtesy and good feeling, remaining separate.

But it is difficult to keep out the *apprehension*, at least, that one party may use undue means to get advantage of the other. It is difficult, indeed, to keep out the thing itself. And how little are the distrust and the disquietudes which hence arise, favorable to the spirit which is proper to a revival! They pervade the thoughts, the conversation, the prayers—of individuals, if not of all; they become visible in intercourse; they divert attention, corrupt the feelings, and grieve the Spirit: and in the end, probably, the great interest is little benefitted by the union.

If, as we before remarked, they all could merge their sectarian feelings in the measure *entirely* ; if they could alike forget Paul, Apollos, and Cephas, in their common attachment to Christ, and had grace enough entirely to fulfil the precept of the apostle, Phil. ii. 2—4 ; the expediency of the measure could not be doubtful. But then,—if they had so much grace as that,—they would cease to exist as separate denominations.

On the whole, then, our imperfections being such as they are, it seems best, in the particular case before us, that each denomination should go on in its own way ; —with as much good will, however, and as little embarrassment to the others, as it can.

Whether all denominations of Christians will ever be merged in one, even in the millenium, may admit of doubt ; and many question whether it is even desirable : but surely in an age like this, so near the millenium, as we flatter ourselves, it becomes every disciple of Christ to be cultivating,

within and around him, the *spirit* of that union which will then certainly prevail.

As to our own denomination, I cannot but hope that there is much in its existing polity and spirit which is favorable to union. They have no imperative human standards to operate as a bar to such an union. The word of God, upon which the union, if it ever exist, must, with a most noble and Christian magnanimity, be formed, is already their only authoritative Confession and Directory. They are ready to turn, with all churches, to the great position with which they all set out at the Reformation, that the Bible alone is the religion of Protestants. They are not only free to commune with Christians of every name at the table of the Lord, which is a small thing, comparatively; but they are ready to co-operate with them, with good faith and heartily, in any benevolent work. Of this spirit in them, nearly every truly liberal and unsectarian institution in this country is their witness. The American

Bible, Tract, Education, and other kindred institutions, in which it has been aimed to secure the co-operation of all denominations, were originated solely, or mainly by them, and have been eminently sustained by their counsels, labors, and contributions. They have their partialities, doubtless, for their own faith and order; they believe them to be founded on the Bible: yet they set up no exclusive pretensions of being the only legitimate church. They have, in their numerous colleges and seminaries, scarcely a single professorship whose duty it is to inculcate their particular scheme of polity; it is little discussed in their pulpits, or even in their books: and so little pains is taken to cherish sectarian partialities in their members, so little are their children nursed up in the narrow faith of *distinctives* and *exclusives*, and *jure divino pretensions*, and so little are they in fact attached to the body by mere sectarian feeling, that, of all people, Congregationalists, when deprived of the privilege of wor-

shipping with those of their own communion, most easily attach themselves to others.

I would not, in these remarks, in the least discredit the liberality of other denominations. There is much in them all—and much, I would hope, in the spirit of the age, that is liberal and catholic. Nor is it pretended that Congregationalists have not their share of human imperfection, or that they are in no degree sectarian; yet, I would fain believe, that of them it may be said, if of any, they have little of the narrowness of sect. The salvation of man is their object, their field the world, the word of God their directory, and their “pale” the kingdom of Christ.

CHAPTER XI.

DOCTRINES AND MEASURES.

THERE are a few things which I have reserved for this chapter, respecting doctrines and measures.

The doctrinal system of the Congregational churches is that which comprises what are commonly called the doctrines of the Reformation; or the doctrines of grace. To their attachment to these, and the constant and faithful exhibition of them in their pulpits and by their authors, still more than to the excellency of their polity, they have owed their beauty, stability, and moral power. And as it has been heretofore, so it must be in time to come. If ever they depart from these doctrines, exchanging them for others less scriptural but more agreeable to the natural man, or

cease to give them their proper place and prominence, their strength and glory will be gone. Their piety will fade away into worldliness and formalism; their zeal be dead, or else erratic; their numbers, scattered; and "reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them." God hath said, "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

While therefore I would urge upon the members of our communion an enlightened and firm attachment to the *order* of our churches, I would still more earnestly persuade them to adhere with constancy to their accustomed *faith*. And I urge this, not simply on the ground that this system of faith is the system of the Bible, and that therefore we are bound to believe and teach it; but I urge it on the ground of its *practical* importance to the prosperity and efficiency of the denomination.

Let it be remembered that the energy of the gospel is chiefly in its *doctrines*. Its *precepts* are, it is true, a perfect rule of

life; and, as such, are a lamp to our feet and a light to our path: but as a means of reforming men, and of edifying churches, they are powerless without the doctrines. The doctrines are the *foundation* of the precepts, and furnish the *motives* to obey them. All duties are prescribed, all invitations and warnings uttered, all appeals to the affections and conscience made, in view of those great facts, or truths, which form the doctrinal part of theology,—which respect the attributes and government of God, the fallen state of man, the retributions of eternity, the mediation of Christ, the necessity of regeneration, the work of the Spirit, with other connected truths. In proportion as these are denied, impaired, or sunk out of view, the gospel loses its consistency and meaning, and like a temple robbed of its keystones and columns, is reduced to a shapeless ruin. To desert or surrender these, is to abandon the heavy ordnance of Christianity and put a period to her conquests. Hence we are directed to “contend earn-

estly for the *faith* once delivered to the saints," and to "hold fast the form of *sound words*." And hence, also, almost all the enmity of ungodly men is vented against the doctrines rather than the ethics of the Bible.

This is not the place to state at large, or to discuss, the doctrinal system of our churches. But when it is considered that the doctrines embraced by them are the same with those which were embraced by the Reformers of the sixteenth century, those great lights whose glory shall never be extinguished—that it was by means of these doctrines, and of the men who held them, that God wrought so great an overthrow of the Papal domination; that these were the doctrines of the Puritans, the Huguenotts, and of all kindred and persecuted men, of every age and country; and when we perceive that wherever this system of doctrines has been faithfully inculcated, the effect has been most singularly happy on the habits and institutions of the people; we cannot doubt that they

are essentially the faith which was once delivered to the saints. God does not effect so great and happy changes by means of error. He does not thus connect his agency with doctrines of man's devising, "working with them, and confirming the word with signs following."

It is no proof of the unsoundness of these doctrines, that they are hated of wicked men; it is rather a proof of their divinity. The truth of God, whatever it may be, was not *made* to *please* men, but to *reform* them; and when was it ever known that wicked men were delighted with *any* doctrine which demanded and enforced their reformation? And what denial or modification of the truth of God was ever made, but to accommodate objectors, replying against God and saying, "Why doth he yet find fault? for who hath resisted his will?" and "This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" That which pleases men in their sins, is self-evidently not truth; but is some "persuasion" which "cometh not of him that calleth you."

The enlightened, practical disciple, I repeat, then, will not surrender, nor timidly conceal, the essential doctrines of the gospel; nor tremble, through fear of the prejudice or displeasure which may be awakened by them in sinful minds, to hear them preached.

I fear there is a tendency in the times to lose sight of the importance of this subject. It is almost a necessary consequence, that in the multiplicity of our religious engagements, and in the abundance of our religious intelligence, in this age of benevolence, we should become diminutive in doctrinal knowledge. And herein is a danger to be guarded against. In all our plans and labors for Christianity, let us not lose sight of its doctrines. These,—as we would promote a healthful state of things,—must be “the light of all our measures, the soul of all our preaching, the stimulus and guide of all our zeal, the antidote to all confusion and wild disorder.” How frankly, how lucidly, and how constantly will the great doctrines of the gospel be preach-

ed, and how complacently listened to, in the millenium—that happy period of which it is written, “Wisdom and KNOWLEDGE shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation.”

In connection with these remarks on the importance of adhering to the *faith* of the gospel, may be urged the almost equal importance of adhering to those *methods of exhibiting it* which are prescribed by its author. In revealing his will to us God has also informed us in what manner, chiefly, he would have it taught and propagated. The gospel includes within itself a system of means for carrying it into effect. This system comprises, as its leading features, the Sabbath; organized churches, with their appropriate sacraments and ordinances; a settled ministry, with its pulpit and pastoral duties; the godly lives of the pious; and the religious education of families. On these means, if on any, we may expect the blessing of God.

It is true this system is not so fully pre-

scribed, in respect to all its details, as to leave nothing to human discretion. But far *less* is left to the wisdom of men than some will believe. In all ages of the church there has been a readiness on the part of some to imagine that the ordinary means of grace become worn out by use, and lose their efficiency ; and that the conversion of souls may be hastened, and the progress of the cause of Christ accelerated, by new methods. And in this way great extravagances have been committed, and great mischiefs have ensued.

It cannot be doubted that it is wise and proper sometimes to resort to *special* means for calling the attention of men to the concerns of the soul ; and that so far as such means are not unscriptural, and are used judiciously, and in a due dependence on God, we may expect his blessing on them. But we must never suffer ourselves to undervalue God's institutions. We must never presume to forsake the ways which he has appointed for the conversion of sinners and the up-building of his kingdom,

or cease to rely on them, in dependence on his Spirit, while we go after the more novel and exciting, and, as we may conceive, more effective arrangements of man's devising.

God never designed that his great cause on earth should be sustained and carried forward by a succession of novelties—by a series of *expedients*, such as the wit of man (fruitful as he is in expedients) might be able to find. He has devised his own system of means; which he designs shall be as permanent as the cause itself, and which he will never fail to bless.

Nor can the kingdom of Christ be healthfully and permanently promoted in any other way, than in the proper use of those means. If religion were only, or chiefly, to be promoted by means of *occasional* and *extraordinary* movements, it must of necessity become a religion of times and seasons,—a series of alternate short excitements and long declensions, instead of a settled habit and a regular and healthful growth. And thus our Savior's instructive

and beautiful image of "a city that is set on an hill," always visible, might be changed for a city hid in the desert, or sunk in the shades of a valley, and seen only in the light of an occasional conflagration.

Whatever special measures we may resort to at times, therefore, our *habitual and main reliance* should be upon the *stated and ordinary* means of grace. Especially, should we look to *the Sabbath and the preaching of the Sabbath*, as the great means appointed of God for the salvation of men. The Sabbath with its appropriate services is set apart for the special purpose of promoting religion ; and though God may bless other judicious and prayerful endeavors of his people, it is not to be supposed that he will forsake his own appointments to follow theirs ; or that he will honor human arrangements above his hallowed day. It was the Sabbath which God hallowed from the beginning of time. It was the Sabbath when Christ rose from the dead. The Sabbath is "the Lord's day." It was

devoted by Christ and his apostles, in an especial manner, to public preaching. “As *his custom was*, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read.”—“And Paul, *as his manner was*, went in unto them, and three SABBATH days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures.”—And he reasoned in the synagogues *every Sabbath*, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.* It was on the *Sabbath*, the day of pentecost—that the Spirit of God was poured out in a most wonderful manner, and three thousand were converted.† More souls have been converted, probably, and will be, to the end of time, by means of the Sabbath than by whatever means beside. There is a solemnity, a sacredness, an authority, about the Sabbath, above every other season, which gives peculiar weight to the word dispensed, and is eminently favorable above other and more exciting occasions, to those

* Luke iv. 16—22. Acts xvii. 2 ; xviii. 4.

† See Gurney on the Sabbath, Chap. 4.

distinct, calm, and conscience-reaching impressions, which ever belong to a genuine work of grace. What Cowper says of the *pulpit* may be said of the *Sabbath pulpit* pre-eminently :

I say the pulpit, *in the sober use*
Of its legitimate, peculiar powers,
Must stand acknowledged, while the world shall stand,
The most important and effectual guard,
Support, and ornament, of virtue's cause.

To the Sabbath then, should our thoughts, our prayers, our hopes, habitually turn for the reviving of God's work. On other endeavors we may indeed expect his blessing ; but let us beware, in looking to these, that we do not suffer ourselves insensibly to undervalue the Sabbath. Let us beware how we induce or encourage an impression, that the Sabbath and its services are but an ordinary thing—a matter of course,—from which little effect is to be looked for ; and that sinners are not to be converted, and the church built up, except in connection with extraordinary measures, and by extraordinary men.

There are many "new measures," as they are technically called, which I have neither the disposition nor room to discuss; but there are several objectionable practices which may not be unworthy of the attention given them in the following pages.

LAY PREACHING.

There is an order of men specially set apart to the work of teaching and preaching. Their duties and qualifications are made the subject of careful instructions in the scriptures. It must therefore be wrong for other men, not qualified and ordained, to assume their place. At the same time, there are certainly some things to be done by laymen. The injunctions, to 'do good,' to 'bear fruit,' to be 'always abounding in the work of the Lord,' are to laymen as well as to ministers; and plainly teach that there is active service for *them*. Moreover; action is important to *health*, spiritual as well as bodily. They cannot be very

growing and lively Christians, who *do* nothing, actively, for Christ's cause.

"An angel's wing would tire if long at rest,
And God, *inactive*, were no longer blest."

But it is difficult to draw precisely *the line* where the forwardness of the layman begins to trench upon the appropriate duties of the minister. What *is* lay-preaching? The question was put to a meeting of ministers, who answered somewhat hesitatingly and variously. Is it wrong for the brethren to *pray* together? to *exhort* one another? to *read and comment on the Bible* together, for their common edification? No. Is it wrong for a layman to warn the impenitent? to reprove sin? or even to address a promiscuous assembly on the concerns of their souls? No: it were to be wished that pious laymen would abound, according to their gifts and acceptableness, in all these things more than they do. But it is agreed, I suppose by all, that for an unordained, or unlicensed man to *take a*

text, or larger passage of scripture, and make a formal discourse from it, whether in a pulpit or in a private room, would make him a preaching layman. It does not alter the case materially, whether he be a private brother, or an unlicensed student in divinity, or whether he be gifted, or otherwise: so long as he is not *regularly authorized*, he is out of his province. Further; for a layman to give out his own appointments, except, perhaps, with the approbation and under the eye of the pastor,—and expect the people to attend where he is to take the lead, and in all things except a text, or a sermon, to speak and act as a minister does, would generally be thought, I suppose, to be going beyond his line.

The Bible addresses ministers respecting their duties thus: “*Preach the word;—reprove,—rebuke,—exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine.*” “*These things command and teach:*” i. e. *teach authoritatively*, as men authorized to speak and be

heard.—“*Charging them before the Lord, &c.*” “*Rightly dividing the word of truth, &c.*”

From these instructions to ministers—to take no notice of the instructions which are given to the people—we must infer that for those who are not ministers to “preach the word,” or in any manner to teach or speak *authoritatively*, or with any appearance of eminence above their brethren, is improper. Let every brother use his gifts and influence to the best he can, for the glory of God and the good of man; but let him do it with becoming modesty, as an uncommissioned disciple, and as claiming no more for himself than an equality with his brethren.

It cannot be difficult, I think, for piety and good sense, with a proper attention to the Bible, to discern where, or about where, the line of propriety runs. Meantime the line exists, and is of great importance. Let all distinction of duties be done away between minister and people,

and ‘confusion,’ if not ‘envying and strife’ and ‘every evil work,’ must be the consequence.

It was such confusion among the Corinthian Christians, all ambitious of exhibiting their gifts, that Paul reproved by demanding, Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? It is not necessary that every one who becomes a Christian should become a preacher. “Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he is called.”

FEMALE PRAYING, OR SPEAKING, IN PROMISCUOUS ASSEMBLIES.

What are our objections to this practice?

1. It is *expressly forbidden in scripture*. “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a

shame for women to speak in the church.”* 1 Cor. xiv. 34, 35. “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.” 1 Tim. ii. 11, 12.

Respecting the first of these passages, it is to be noticed, that the apostle is upon the very business of correcting disorderly practices in Christian assemblies; and he mentions females' speaking as one of these practices, and unequivocally disallows it. And of the other passage it is to be observed, that it occurs in an express *letter of instructions* to Timothy as a minister, and to all ministers. The *design*, therefore, of both these passages is as obvious as the language is explicit.

* The word *church*, in the New Testament, does not mean a public assembly in a synagogue, or house of worship like ours, merely, but it often means such small assemblies as met in private houses, and ‘upper rooms.’ “Salute Nymphas, and the church which is in his house;” that is the church which meets at his house. Col. iv. 15.—See also Rom. xvi. 5. Philem. 2; and the New Testament everywhere.

How is it possible to misunderstand an injunction so plain and so repeated ! “ I know (says one) that these texts have been explained away ; but so have the proof texts which teach the divinity of Christ, the depravity of man, the reality of the atonement, and the necessity of regeneration. Any thing may be explained away by those who are determined to obey their own will instead of the Bible.”

Let us attend to the *reason* which the apostle gives. He says ‘ it is a *shame* for a woman to speak,’ on account of her relation to the other sex, or her place in society. In the passage in Timothy he gives the same reason coupled with another, namely, the proper *modesty* of her sex. He evidently means to imply that it is unbecoming for females to be so forward as to speak in promiscuous assemblies, for the same reason that certain styles of dress are unbecoming. Read the passage in its connection. “ In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shame-facedness and sobriety ;

not with broidered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array ; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works. Let the woman learn in silence, &c. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, was in the transgression." 1 Tim. ii. 9—14.

The propriety of this reason of the apostle has been universally felt and acted upon by mankind ; in refined nations, as well as in barbarous. They have universally felt that it is unsuited to the modesty of woman to speak in public assemblies. The *bar* excludes her ; so do the *legislature*, and the *popular assembly*. The reason of the thing is founded in nature,—not in *prejudice*, or custom, but in *nature*. It has generally been deemed monstrous for a woman's voice to be heard, as a speaker in any promiscuous secular assembly. Nor is her appearance in such assemblies ever anticipated in any scheme of female education. It is in *religious* assemblies chiefly that this anomaly is seen : nor has the

sanction which has been given to the practice by some preachers and churches, made the practice, as yet, respectable *there*, in the eyes of intelligent people. Notwithstanding the commonness of the thing, it is still felt to be an impropriety: and it will be, so long as nature shall control the sentiments of mankind.

2. Besides that the practice is prohibited by Paul, there are no *examples*,—or none which can be taken for precedents—throughout the history of the several religious dispensations. Of the “preachers of righteousness” before the flood, that we have any account of, none were women. Nor do we find that females ever officiated in the public services of religion, under the Patriarchal and Mosaic, or Levitical, dispensations. Nor did Christ send females forth to preach and teach as he did the seventy; or leave any commission or give any instructions for their doing so, in succeeding times. There has been but one law about this business from the beginning of time. All that is said of woman in the

Bible, from the day she was formed until now,—all that is said of her character, her relations, her demeanor, is of a piece with the above citations from the apostle, and may stand as an impracticable commentary on them.

3. She is not *fitted* for speaking in public. She may have *mind* enough, but she wants the *physical* qualities—the *voice* and *nerve*, which are requisite. The voice of woman, like the susceptibilities of her heart, is delightfully formed *for her sphere*,—for the tones of love in her family, for the enlivening converse of the parlor, for the tender offices of sympathy; but it is no more formed for the public assembly than the lute is formed for the camp. She is not *fitted*, I say, for speaking in public, and it is not to be supposed, therefore, that her Creator expects her to do that for which he has not fitted her. He does not gather where he has not strowed.

4. It is not the design, or nature of religion, to impair by its requirements the proper character of its subjects. On the

contrary, it seeks to heighten and adorn whatever belongs to our nature as God originally made us. It regards the proprieties of sex. It condemns effeminacy in man, and masculineness in woman. It does not require woman to cease to be woman because she becomes a Christian ; but on the contrary, inculcates an amiable modesty of feeling and demeanor beyond what she possessed before. But no female, and no *young* female especially,—in whom naturally there is the timid reserve of youth, as well as of sex—can engage as an exhorter, or leader of prayer, in the presence of men, without her delicacy being blunted, in proportion to the frequency, and boldness, with which she engages in the unseemly and forbidden exercise. “ *There is generally, and should be always, in the female character, (says Dr. Beecher) a softness and delicacy of feeling which shrinks from the notoriety of a public performance. It is the guard of female virtue, and invaluable in its soothing, civilizing in-*

fluence on man; and a greater evil, next to the loss of conscience and chastity, could not befall the female sex, or the community at large, than to disrobe the female mind of those ornaments of sensibility, and clothe it with the rough texture of masculine fibre. But no well educated female can put herself up, or be put up to the point of public prayer, without the loss of some portion at least of that female delicacy, which is above all price; and whoever has had an opportunity to observe the effect of female exhortation and prayer in public will be compelled to remark the exchange of softness and delicacy for masculine courage, so desirable in man, so unlovely in woman; and if we need farther testimony, the general character of actresses is a standing memorial of the influence of female elocution before public assemblies.”*

There is one passage, and only one, so far as I know, which is supposed to favor

* Letter to Beman.

the practice of females speaking in the church ; which I will notice directly.

There are, however, a few instances which I believe are sometimes pleaded ; as Deborah, Anna, and the daughters of Philip. But these were *inspired* women, and are therefore not to be taken for precedents, unless our women also claim to be inspired. If God, who has a right to make exceptions to his general laws, has at different times imparted the spirit of prophesying to holy women, for the same end that he endued the apostles and others with the power of healing and working miracles and speaking with tongues, namely, for confirming the truth of religion, this cannot be pleaded to set open a door for all the sex to speak.

The passage referred to above is 1 Cor. xi. 3—16. On this passage I observe,

(1.) That the best commentators, and *all* the commentators which I have been able to consult, understand the females here alluded to, to have spoken under a

miraculous influence.* Of the correctness of this interpretation he who will may satisfy himself by an intelligent reading of the passage, and its context. The passage speaks of women that prayed and *prophe-sied*,—a word which never signifies speaking in an ordinary manner. And throughout the context,—read from the beginning of the eleventh to the end of the fourteenth chapter,—the apostle is speaking of miraculous gifts. These females then were *prophetesses*, and being such, are not a precedent for us,—unless, I say, our female speakers are prophetesses likewise. They belong to the class of Deborah and the others.

(2.) The apostle reprobates the practice as inconsistent with woman's modesty, even in prophetesses, except under certain regulations, namely, with the head veiled.

* As most of my readers, probably, have Scott's commentary at hand, I refer them to that. They may read, if they please, what he says on the several passages before us ; 1 Cor. xi. 2—16 ; xiv. 34, 35 ; and 1 Tim. ii. 11—14.

“ Judge in yourselves ; is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered ?” And he demands if even nature does not teach them, that what is becoming in a man is not becoming in a woman.

(3.) To make the most we can of the passage, it is not so clear that it favors the practice in question, as it is that the other passages cited do positively forbid it ; and according to a well known law of interpretation, if two passages appear to be at variance with each other, that which is most plain is to determine us. The clear is to interpret the obscure or doubtful, and not the obscure the clear.

There is, however, no obscurity in the case ; nor any collision between the passages. The fact undoubtedly is, that some females *endued with the gift of prophesy*, spoke in the meetings of the Corinthians, where some also spoke with tongues, and some wrought miracles of healing ; but these were special cases belonging to those times. The *general law*, is laid down in

the passages first quoted. In those passages a modest *silence* is enjoined on females in all mixed religious assemblies.

What then can be said in defence of the practice, when, as it appears, both revelation and nature are against it?

Is it said that women are often *better qualified* to exhort or pray in a meeting than the men that are present, and can speak more to edification? It may be true; but what then? This does not alter the scripture. So too are some unordained men better qualified to preach than some ministers are; but this does not justify their taking the pulpit. So too are some wives, and mothers, better qualified to lead in family devotions, or family government, than their husbands are; but are they therefore warranted to do so in the presence of their husbands? We are not at liberty to bring in our particular case of expediency to supersede God's standing laws. If God says, let your women keep

silence in the churches, it is presumption and impiety to answer, that they are qualified to speak and therefore they shall !

Is it alledged that *good* comes of the practice ?—that you can name the individuals that have been impressed and converted by hearing a female speak ? The answer is still the same. If it be *not in the Bible*, if it be *prohibited* there, it cannot be justified. How much good or evil it does, is not the question ; but whether it is agreeable to the scripture. People are impressed by a great many things and good comes out of evil. I was acquainted with a youth who was powerfully awakened by an instance of anger and profaneness ; but I never thought of enlisting anger and profaneness into my system of means for converting men, on account of the good which they did in that particular instance.

But as for the good which is done, or supposed to be done, by means of this practice, it is the conviction of multitudes

of sensible people that the mischief infinitely surpasses the good. It may serve to give notoriety to a meeting, and to draw a multitude together, some in the simplicity of their hearts to approve and be edified, perhaps, but more to gape and look on ; it may serve to make converts to a name, a sect, a party, or a fashion in religion ; and it *may* serve, possibly, to make some converts to Christ,—I will not affirm that it never does ; but that it is, on the whole, calculated to glorify God and advance the cause of Christ ; that it tends to elevate religion in the view of the world, and to increase the aggregate number of converted souls ; and that it would be well to introduce it into all churches ; is unhesitatingly disbelieved, nay, upon the basis of the Bible is confidently denied.

But females need not feel that they are *debarred from usefulness* because “ it is not permitted unto them to speak ” in the church. There are many ways in which they may be, and are, to their credit, ex-

ceedingly useful. In many ways of efficient, but unobtrusive influence, they are winning souls to Christ. They that are acquainted with woman's history, from the beginning till now, or with the signs and movements of the times, will hardly think her behind the other sex, in the service of Christ. And I doubt not, when they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars forever and ever,—that then woman shall receive her full and enviable share of the glory.

Thy works, and alms, and all thy good endeavor,
Staid not behind, nor in the grave were trod ;
But, as faith pointed with her golden rod,
Followed thee up to joy and bliss forever.

HASTY ADMISSIONS TO THE CHURCH.

There has been much futile reasoning and appealing to apostolic example, in favor of the practice of receiving persons into the church *immediately* on their conversion.

That this was done by the apostles is true. But they did it with reasons which do not exist at present. A willingness to profess Christ then, was, in itself, a greater evidence of genuine faith than such a profession is now. The times themselves "tried men's souls," and rendered probation unnecessary. For when believers were "made a gazing stock, both by reproaches and afflictions," and were beset with "manifold temptations;" when to be cast out of the synagogue, and to be scattered abroad by persecutions, and to be killed, as a service rendered to God, was the price of a Christian profession, it was not difficult, generally, for the disciples to know the spirit of those who proposed to join them. The thing most to be apprehended was, not that the unsanctified would come forward, but that true converts would keep back. And there were reasons which more nearly concerned the candidates themselves. They needed immediately the sympathy and fellowship

of the church, to sustain them against the pressure of the times.

But the practice was early discontinued. It was discontinued, there is reason to believe, by the apostles themselves, but certainly in the first century, as the reader of church history knows. When 'the churches had rest,' and were multiplied, and it was less embarrassing, if not more popular, to join them, there was some delay usually before candidates were received; both that the church might be better assured of their piety, and that they might receive, if necessary, the requisite instruction in the truths of the gospel.*

It is doubtless an error to put off profession too long; but that there should be *some* interval between conversion and uniting with the church, the following reasons may satisfy us.

1. There should be some time for the convert to *examine himself*. For not all

* See Murdock's Mosheim, Vol. I. p. 97, § 5.

who suppose themselves converts, and that with rejoicing and confidence, really are so. There are some who 'anon receive the word with joy,' but 'have no deepness of earth ; and when the sun is up they are scorched ; and because they have no root they wither away.' "But let a man examine himself, (says the apostle,) and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup."

2. There ought to be some opportunity for the *church* to be satisfied. The candidate comes to them, as a new subject, to be received to their communion and fellowship. But this fellowship, to be real, must be justified by evidence. It must be founded on a satisfactory knowledge of the person's previous and present habits, feelings, motives, and views of truth. But all this cannot be taken at sight, and upon the individual's simple profession, however apparently sincere ; when, for aught we know, he may be as ignorant of himself as we are of him, and when we have too much cause to remember that in hundreds of cases the

goodness of such as have made similar hopeful professions has proved but as a morning cloud, and as the early dew.

It is therefore due to the members that they should have *some* time for a more private and familiar acquaintance with the candidate, than they can have from his confession, or from an immediate public examination, at the instant of his supposed conversion.

3. A just concern for the *purity of the church*. If we are required to *purge out* the old leaven that we may be a new lump, it is certainly proper that we should exercise due care to *keep* it out. Who does not know that often there are many more who are disposed to press into the *church* than are actually pressing into the *kingdom of heaven*. Especially is this the fact in times of great and general awakening. Who does not know enough of revivals, and of mankind, to know, that it is a difficult thing to detach so large a mass from the world and add it to the church, as is often done, without drawing some portion

of the world along with it? How many secret ties there are, binding the renewed and unrenewed together,—ties of kindred, of companionship, of *love*, which inspire the resolve that the one shall not be taken and the other left! Alas for our churches when this shall be our practice—when all that self-delusion encourages, or sympathy moves, or interest draws, or remorse and fears impel, shall be admitted without delay!

What is the object of examining candidates at all? It is to keep our churches pure. If once this practice be given up (says Owen,) “a world of unqualified persons will soon fill, and pester and corrupt the house of God, and cause him to go far off from his sanctuary.” But we may almost as well dispense with the practice of examining at all as to admit persons immediately upon their professed conversion.

I do not know that any *definite rule* can be laid down as to the length of time which should elapse before admission, or that this is desirable. It depends much on circum-

stances—the previous habits of the candidate,—his natural temperament—his knowledge—his years, perhaps, and the clearness of his present views and feelings.

GENERAL OBSERVANCE OF ORDER.

This chapter, and this volume, may be properly concluded with some remarks on the importance of a general observance of established order.

An interest so extended as the church of Christ, and in which so great a variety of persons are concerned, must have some general rules of propriety according to which its affairs are to be conducted. All societies have such rules. They are not always exactly defined and written, but they are such and so far known that it is not difficult for modesty and good sense to keep within them.

These rules must not be disregarded. Every essential departure from them is of mischievous tendency. It may be *con-*

venient to do certain things, in certain cases, when it would not be best on the whole. It might be convenient sometimes for an unlicensed student to preach, or for an unordained licentiate to administer ordinances; it might appear to be well, in the view of some, for the ardent brethren of one parish to push their labors into another; or for a "revival preacher" to throw himself with violence into the parish of a minister whom he thought deficient in zeal; it might be pleasant to some, and very lively and edifying, according to their notions of edification, that every one, when we come together, should have a psalm, a doctrine, a tongue, a revelation, an interpretation. But think of the consequences of these things. What confusion and disorder are introduced among us! What disgusts and alienations! What discredit to religion!

If one, following his own particular humor, may break down the fence on one side, another will do the same on another

side, till we have no acknowledged order, and are become "like a city broken down and without walls." There may be, possibly, *too much* regard to order, too punctilious an observance of forms ; but too much is better than none.

The founders of the Congregational order were eminently lovers of liberty ; and they introduced into their system as much freedom as they could without licentiousness. They set up no *superfluous* landmarks. They run no unnecessary lines. But they respected *decency* not less than liberty, and feared licentiousness not less than despotism. "There is a liberty, (said one of their excellent magistrates,*) which is affected both by *men* and *beasts* to do *what they list* ; and this liberty is inconsistent with authority, impatient of all restraint. By this liberty *sumus omnes deteriores* ; [we are all debased] 'tis the grand enemy of truth and peace, and all the ordinances of God are bent against it." They estab-

* Gov. Winthrop.

lished their regulations with great prayerfulness and consideration, and with equal knowledge of the Bible and of men. Under these regulations our churches have, for above two centuries, enjoyed unparalleled prosperity. And it were impiety, it were treason now, to break down a system which has been blessed of God, and respected of men, so eminently and so long.

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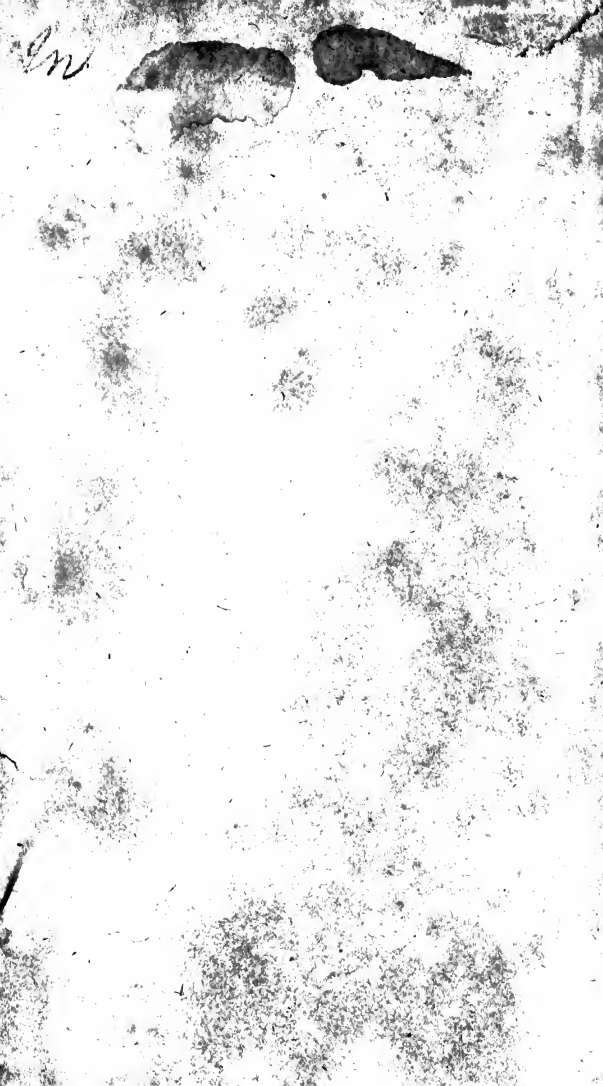
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